THE LIFE ROMANTIC

RICHARD LE GALLIENNE

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THE LIFE ROMANTIC

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The Life Romantic

INCLUDING

THE LOVE-LETTERS OF THE KING

BY

RICHARD LE GALLIENNE

AUTHOR OF

"THE QUEST OF THE GOLDEN GIRL," ETC

LONDON

HURST AND BLACKETT, LIMITED

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TO

JULIE, AND HESPER, AND EVA.

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THE LIFE ROMANTIC.

CHAPTER I.

IN A TWO-WHEELED HEAVEN.

Late one spring afternoon, quite recently, a hansom, almost intolerably radiant with happiness —so it seemed to other hansoms going east—was driving through St. James's Park in the direction of Buckingham Palace. It contained two people, a man and a woman, not too young and not too old, and it was from them that the effulgence proceeded.

"Let us make life wonderful for each other," the man was saying.

"You have already made it wonderful for me," the woman answered.

Thus they completed the second hour of their acquaintance.

They were in all the exaltation of first love experienced for the twentieth time. Sudden love had come upon them while they were drinking tea at Mrs. Lanyon's that very afternoon. In an instant they had known each other, swooped down into each other's eyes. Their first words had been almost a declaration.

"How strange it is!" Pagan Wasteneys had said, in his most mystic and sincere manner.

"What is strange?" asked Daffodil Mendoza, with warm eyes that knew quite well.

"Strange that we should meet."

"Wouldn't it have been stranger if we had not met?" asked Daffodil, pretending to be shy at her impulsiveness.

"You feel that too! . . . But it is strange all the same, for I so narrowly missed coming here to-day at all. To tell the truth, I was feeling rather bored, and inclined just to laze away the afternoon in my chair; but something kept on saying 'go.' Have you instincts like that? Mys-

terious senses that hint impending joy or sorrow? I'm sure you have. Well, something kept saying that I would meet You. . . . I haven't even caught your name, but I know it is YOU!"

"Yes, it is I," said Daffodil, half laughing and half impassioned. "I, Daffodil Mendoza."

"*Mrs.* Daffodil Mendoza?"

"Yes"—with a pretty sigh.

"I always think Mrs. such a charming addition to the prettiest name."

* * * * * *

"Yes! it is strange," said Wasteneys again, meditatively, half to himself, as the dullest of all palaces came in sight, "very strange."

"Tell me," asked Daffodil, with tenderest sympathy. She knew that Wasteneys' face was plainly hinting at despairs and perhaps depths from which she had come at the decreed moment to save him.

"So strange," Wasteneys continued, "that we should meet now—now, when I need you so."

"Do you think I can help you?" Daffodil asked —O, so womanly.

For answer Wasteneys looked at her, and reverently laid his hand on hers, his face plainly showing that he could not speak of it now, but that indeed she and she alone could save him from the abyss of that mysterious sorrow.

"Don't speak of it, if it hurts you," said Daffodil, adding a "dear" as shy and fragrant as a blush-rose.

"Some day," said Wasteneys.

"Is there to be a 'some day' for us?"

"Can you doubt it? Don't you know?"

"Yes, I know."

"May I call you 'Daffodil'?"

"Yes—Pagan."

"You darling!"

* * * * * *

"When shall we meet again?"

"To-morrow? It must be to-morrow. Will you come for tea—about three?"

"May I?"

"Yes—and now I'm afraid you must go. We had better not drive up to the door together. We are very near now. O, it is so hard to leave you. Think of me to-night."

"God keep you, Daffodil; you don't know what this means to me."

"And to me."

Now, of course, each knew that it meant absolutely nothing.

CHAPTER II.

IN WHICH PAGAN WASTENEYS CURSES—AND BLESSES—WOMEN.

THE hansom had hardly moved on again before Pagan Wasteneys had already drafted in his head the telegram of disappointment which he would send at the last moment on the morrow.

"O, what folly it all is!" he said, half aloud. "It must end. I am sick, sick of it all.

> "'What of soul was left, I wonder—
> When the kissing had to stop?'"

In fact, Pagan Wasteneys was exceedingly sad about himself. And, without wishing to be hard upon him, it was quite time he should realise that he was wasting a rare nature and exceptional gifts in an idle pursuit of women, which had not even the excuse of an imperative sensuality. Yes! a

crowd of little women, without a thought of harm, were eating up his soul as they would nibble chocolate. It must have been his own fault, you say! Of course. Everything is our own fault—if you are able to think so. Sadder observers of human life have been driven to the conclusion that a man's mistakes are not so much his own as he would fain believe; that, indeed, he makes them, not so much to please himself, as to gratify the vanity of some natural law, which for the moment whirls him about, as a masterful stream has its way with a straw. Woman is a natural law. She has her way with us; an absurd, irrational force, which we laugh at, while it sweeps us away.

Wasteneys had taken to women as some men take to dominoes. His life had failed—or seemed to fail. It had ended at twenty-eight; ended, that is, for all the uses to which he cared to put it. But, in spite of this essential conclusion of his life, Wasteneys found himself in the possession of a superfluous stock of vitality, which must be spent somehow. Occasionally, he used it still to make an unavoidable poem of. Being moderately rich, he

was debarred from the wasting exertions of that struggle for existence which mercifully shortens life. Parliament was too foolish. Literature was too ambitious—besides, he had succeeded in literature. Suicide was too serious. Only women were left. And he let the women take him. For a man in despair woman is the line of least resistance. What *did* it matter, after all!

And, of course, it was the One Woman that was responsible for all this.

Yet a man is a man, and to every man God has given something to *do*—unless he does which he goes to his grave an active disappointment, likely to appear later as a turbulent ghost. Some spirit, leaning out of the air, had whispered to Pagan Wasteneys even in his cradle that he was born with Something to Do, and he had never been able quite to forget that divine whisper. He knew that he was a Noun, and that these little women were but parasitical Adjectives. Therefore it was that, at twilight that spring evening, Pagan Wasteneys solemnly cursed women, as he walked back to his lodging through St. James's Park.

Yet even as he cursed them, he could not help blessing them too—for the sake of the One Woman; and there came to his lips a certain prayer of Thanksgiving for Kind and Beautiful Women which he had written long ago.

To the Power that made me, and, all undeserving, set me in this wonderful world,
I give thanks for kind and beautiful Women.
For their sweet faces, I give thanks.
For their soft voices, I give thanks.
For their thick bright hair and their little ears, I give thanks.
For their deep eyes and their kind lips and for their little feet.
And for their musical walking, and every other grace and mystery and goodness that is theirs; I give thanks to the Power that made me—and gave me eyes to see them, and ears to hear them, and hands to touch them.
For Kind and Beautiful Women, O Gracious Unseen Power, receive the Thanks of a Man.

In his heart Wasteneys thought far more seriously of women than one might gather from this prayer, with its almost Oriental attitude to woman, as half child and half toy. He was too modern to think otherwise; and, if indeed he considered that woman's beauty was more important than her mind, it was because, in whatever relation, he always considered beauty more important than mind. Beauty was to

him the most serious meaning of life, or rather hint of life's meaning.

Woman also brought him that sense of strangeness and original wildness, that zest of mystery and unfathomable delight in being, for which he chiefly valued all natural things. She was the wild bird in civilization. She never forgot the woods, however tame and content she might seem in the social aviary. Leave the door of her cage open a moment —and she was off somewhere singing "Free! free! free!" among the green leaves.

Then, too, how good she was, how brave, how true! What a mother heart there was somewhere even in the most trivial woman he had known. What warm, heroic impulses she had, what a gift for sacrifice. Beneath a surface cynicism, he never forgot how good the most unimportant little woman who had wasted his days had been to him. He remembered kind looks, which alone were acts of divine charity. Yes! Woman took much—yet she gave back much again. All, at least, she had to give. If she were a vampire, she was a vampire quite unconscious and well-meaning. Even that

big sensual Daffodil meant no harm. How could she be expected to know that she was one more danger to a sad and striving soul—she a danger who had meant only to be a delight—particularly when that sad and striving soul chose to disguise itself in the flippancies of a whimsical amorist?

But cursing is seldom logical. On the contrary it is essentially illogical. It is really meant to be a general recognition in terms of strong emotion that something has gone wrong with our lives; but it is apt to take advantage of some particular accident, in itself probably innocent, whereby the more forcibly to express itself. The fault need not indeed be our own—though, indeed, if clearly so, damning oneself is as uninteresting as solo whist. The Universe is the real culprit—but what is the use of damning the Universe?

Wasteneys had no sincere quarrel with women, not even with the One Woman, but his recognition of that fact, and of all their beauty and mysterious greatness, did not prevent his once more cursing them, as he remembered all he was ordained to be

and all he was not—because of One Woman, or rather because he had lost One Woman, and because of all the women who were the innocent obstacles in the upward pathway of his life. And his cursing was somewhat in this fashion—no more entirely serious, it will be observed, than his blessing:

Cursed be Woman !
Cursed be all Women—except One Woman, whom God bless.
Cursed be the Woman who forgets all for your sake.
Cursed be the Woman who writes to you every day.
Cursed be the Woman who would gladly die for your sake.
Cursed be the Woman who has a Mission to Help you.
Cursed be Women with Blue eyes, likewise Women with Grey, Brown, Green, Hazel and Violet eyes.
Cursed be Little Women, and cursed also be Women that are tall.
Cursed be Women with Golden Hair, and also Women with Black.
Cursed too the Brown-haired Women . . .

Wasteneys could curse no further without laughing. It was his gravest weakness that he could not long be serious without laughing. He used to say that it was his humour alone that prevented his being a great man; and, if you think of it, no really great world-making man has had a sense of humour—except Shakespeare, who, after all, was only a writer.

Pagan Wasteneys was seriously unhappy about himself, black sorrowful: so it was that as he mounted his staircase he was humming this sad little new-made song:

> "O Pagan Wasteneys! Pagan Wasteneys O!
> Why will you waste your one existence so!
> Waste it on married women—and unmarried;
> Waste it on every woman that you know!"

CHAPTER III.

ONE WAY OF SORROW.

THE greatest of all poets has written: "He jests at scars who never felt a wound." Now I venture to think that there he is precisely wrong. It is your mortally wounded man who jests at scars. Pagan Wasteneys was mortally wounded. He knew that, however he might carry himself externally, his soul was finally stricken. Had it been otherwise, it had been easier to be ambitious, easier to cut a serious figure in the world, easier to do that Something, whatever it might be, for which beneath all he felt himself created. The nature and manner of his mortal wound will transpire later.

Sorrow is popularly supposed to have an ennobling and refining influence—like Poverty. On some few natures it doubtless operates in that way.

Oftener, I fear, its influence is quite otherwise. For what, after all, does a really great sorrow mean—but the withdrawal of our *raison d'être?* A few unnatural people may thrive on the loss of all that makes life real to them, but for the majority—cut the tap-roots of joy, and the human tree falls into decay. Moralist spectators may say that there is still left you an extravagant supply of reasons for going on living. If only they had your gifts, your opportunities, your wealth! How gladly they might take them all. Ah! the beautiful apparatus—so useless now!

Besides, who are you that shall dictate to the mysterious soul of another? The soul of man takes strange fancies. It is apt to lay up its treasure in little precarious heavens, the heavenliness of which others cannot understand. A little child, perhaps, shall be its heaven. The child dies—or lives on to break your heart. It is true that Parliament is still open to you. Many sounding things remain to be done. The gates of other people's heavens are hospitably thrown open. But where is your little child?

There still remains much beauty, much music, in the world—but it all belongs to other people. Your beauty has withered, your music has ceased. The heaven has enough stars for us all—but what if the tiny star on which we had set our hearts has shot down the gulf of space some November night, and shines for us no more, is perhaps lying somewhere, a cinder, on the iron floor of the universe?

No! Heaven is a personal matter. The soul can submit to no dictation concerning its heaven. The heart knows its own bitterness, because it knows so well its own joy.

Well, Wasteneys had lost his joy. His little star had shot beyond his vision even at his first moment of beholding it. Do you wonder that he should be indifferent to Parliament, or that books seemed hardly worth writing now? The springs of action had dried up with the springs of joy. By every law of sorrow, made by those who have never known it, he should have come out of all this a greater man. It should, in fact, have been the making of him. Perhaps, unknown to himself, it was doing this for him all the time, one of those

expensive processes of development which we do not realise till they have done their work.

It must not be supposed that Wasteneys had fanatically nursed his sorrows, or willingly set up the image of one woman thus to preside over his life. On the contrary, he had mocked and flouted this possession of his, and been unfaithful to it in every possible way. Nor even had he disdained the vulgar anodynes—though, indeed, he laughed as he tried them, to think it might be supposed possible for any such cheap drugs to narcotise a soul like his.

Besides, he had seriously sought some other face of woman that might with its lustre dim the face that burned day and night in his heart. That was perhaps the reason of his turning eagerly to women, when the one woman he had loved had been lost to him. As a great living poet expresses it: "He had sought the asp for serpents' bites!"

> "But woman is not I opine
> Her sex's antidote."

The old wound was as fresh as ever, and he was sick to death of the paltry cures. Laughter was

the only real help he had. So he laughed softly at himself night and day, and took what pleasure he could in trifles, posing now this way and now that, incidentally making several good little women happy—for he hurt none of them—with the surplusage of his soul.

Thus he gained a great reputation for "Romance!" It was whispered that he lived "The Life Romantic!" What strange mistakes are made by the intelligent spectator!

CHAPTER IV.

CONCERNING ESSENTIAL EXISTENCE.

Now I can well understand that this talk about women and strangeness and what not, this hinted spectacle of an able-bodied man ruined because life refused him the particular moonbeam on which, like a big baby, he had set his heart: that all this is very tiresome and exasperating for certain readers—for whom it is not intended. Why on earth couldn't Wasteneys go and hack somebody with a sword—like a man?

Well, Wasteneys could have done that too had he been so minded; for he was a well-made athletic fellow, a passionate rider, a great out-of-doors man, for all his moonbeams—but then he didn't care about it. It didn't amuse him. Killing, however brilliant, stirred his sense of pity, not his lust for blood;

though indeed there was that in him which vibrated with joy at the assassination of a tyrant, or the noble murder of a mean enemy.

Broadly speaking, there are in England only two recognised occupations for a gentleman. He can either kill his fellow men, or govern them. To Wasteneys one occupation was as uninteresting as the other.

In short, his circumstances allowed to him the perilous privilege of what I may call essential living. It is a privilege which anyone not absolutely compelled to work for a livelihood may enjoy. It is the most terrible burden of the rich, and it is the danger of most women. The lifetime of the multitude is providentially occupied in non-essential living, in various mechanical businesses done merely from the widely diffused desire to keep going man's physical existence.

I believe that most men, not merely poets, work on in the hope that some day they will have so securely provided for the body, that they will have time before the end to work for the soul. To them too the body is but a pedestal at which all this time

they have been working, so that some day they may proudly set upon it the winged marble of the soul. Perhaps they are the happier in that they seldom complete even the pedestal, and indeed, after a time, forget that there is anything beyond pedestal. Better far be strenuously absorbed in clothing and feeding the body than have too much leisure for the soul; unless indeed your soul be very active, or very happy. The material necessities of life shield us from the fierce cold of the outer abyss of thought, as they save us too from the siren call of the senses. Blessed are the bricklayer, and the clerk, and the shopman, and all other slaves; for when the hard day is done they are too weary for thought, too weary for sorrow, too weary for disastrous dreams.

When a man is not compelled to earn his own food and clothing, and takes no interest either in killing or governing his fellows, he is in great danger. That is why most rich men are either so sad, so dull, or so brutalised. They have nothing to do. They were born to work eight hours a day at the pedestal, and they are unaccustomed to the business of the soul. Their only hope is some trivial hobby. Such may

save them. Else, being denied the energising activity of clothing and feeding their bodies, they may devote themselves to the one physical occupation left: that of sensualising them.

Wasteneys, of course, was not so poor in spiritual resources. But for a divine accident, he had been more than content to find the meaning of life in one of those arts of beauty for which a lifetime is proverbially short. As a boy his dream was to be a poet, and by the side of this dream—though he had his youthful loves and friendships, very ardent—all human interests were but phantom voices to which now and again he would pay courteous heed. In his heart, however, he knew that he cared for nothing but to make beautiful things. And this desire, being accompanied by faculty, had not gone without its fruition. Pagan Wasteneys had made beautiful things. This dream and its fulfilment had satisfied him right through his young manhood. It was more than enough, he thought, for many lives. At least it overflowed his present life with rainbows.

It need not be said that he had not created beauty without the willing aid of love. Women had inspired

him as they have inspired all the men who have made or done anything. Not accidentally, we may be sure, did the Greeks, with their unerring instinct for universal symbolism, make the Muses women. But as yet women had stopped at inspiring him. That the beauty of a woman might not merely inspire but eclipse the beauty of art, was a thought that had never presented itself to his mind in the vaguest form. Even when that miracle had happened it took him long to realise. But it did happen one strange morning in his twenty-ninth year, and from that moment his occupation was gone. All the beauty of the world had suddenly concentrated and withdrawn in one face. No art could any longer fill the large leisure of his soul. So Pagan Wasteneys found himself with the burden of a life which he was compelled to live "essentially"—but from which the motive essential had been taken away.

Many men in his position would have worked all the harder, and indeed he did work harder for a while. Not being a soldier, he could not recklessly hurl the charmed life of sorrow into some hell of fight; nor did the House of Commons seem to offer a sufficiently

august employment for the disbanded energies of his spirit. But he threw himself wildly into the old life of words—till one day he suddenly realised that words were as dreary to him as all else. All the words in the world seemed to have died. Only a woman's name survived.

CHAPTER V.

SOME POOR ALTERNATIVES.

OF course, there were a few other things Wasteneys might have done besides killing or governing his fellows. He might have taken to climbing terrible mountain-peaks, become one of those idealists of height, whose formula of romance is the phrase: "so many thousand feet above the sea." But then Wasteneys loved the sea.

He might have travelled "in strange lands," and he would undoubtedly have done so, but for the conviction that they were no longer strange, and that, at all events, they would not seem strange to him. Besides, he had already travelled! He was seeking a strangeness that went deeper than well-known changes of climate and costume and speech. He sought:

> . . . "a drink more deadly and more strange
> Than ever grew on any earthly vine";

and his search was all the more hopeless because he knew that he had finally found what he was seeking.

He knew that nothing would ever seem strange to him again, except the face that was with him night and day. Therefore, his search was only half-hearted, and he soon gave up any serious thought of it. In fact, he ceased to be a serious being altogether. As far as possible, he locked up his real self, as he thought, in a safe place, and prepared to take life as lightly as some friends of his, whose sad laughing faces he began to understand; to live it as a very light comedy. He had once said that life was a tragedy with intervals of farce. He proposed to live it as a farce, with as few intervals of tragedy as possible.

He early began to note certain changes in his nature. He who had always loved solitude suddenly discovered that he dreaded to be alone. So he fell upon the scientific discovery—and sorrow is a far greater discoverer than Newton—of Society as an Anodyne. He had often wondered, austerely occupied with his art, why men and women, year

after year, paced the dull round of social life, flocked so talkatively to dull dinners, dull luncheons, dull receptions, dull weddings. Now he began to understand. These were serious people who dare not be serious. Like madmen, it was not safe for them to be left alone with their thoughts. Any society was better than their own. Society was a place where they might, literally, laugh at their terrors, profanely mock their hearts' tragedies to each other in glittering talk; as in plague-stricken cities of old time men and women flouted the fear of death with terrible toasts—an eternal emblem of the mirth of society. So it was that Wasteneys became a diner-out, a talker, a maker of *mots*. Ah!

> "Was it for this that he had given away
> His ancient wisdom and austere control?"

Sometimes unseen he would shed a tear into his wine-glass, and next moment present it to his neighbour as a pearl of wit. Champagne has this curious effect upon tears. The aphoristic influence of sorrow is one of the strangest things about it. Of course, there were those who understood. Society

is very clever. One of Wasteneys' friends, who had never yet had to face anything real, and had, therefore, remained serious, once asked Wasteneys what was wrong with him.

"There is a ghastly burning in your face, old man," he had said; "what's the trouble?"

"Witty degeneration of the heart," Wasteneys had answered—and the phrase was something more than a cheap epigram.

Wasteneys noted too that he began to weary of, positively dislike, good people; not because they were good, but because they were serious. Really bad people he disliked still more, because they were still more serious. Anyone who was really doing or being something strenuously successful he fled from as from a North-Easter. More and more he sought the companionship of the seriously unsuccessful; the men who talked brilliantly of what they might have done, and were, of course, still going to do. Men with strong brains and weak wills; idealistic drunkards who grew Titanic with creative energy, though they never moved from their chairs; all sad men who talked, and from whose lips rose

the fairy bubbles of dreams that would exist for ever in no other form. Over these he grew compassionate.

There was one man, a fat, beaming, silvery voice of failure, to whom his heart was particularly drawn, and whom he pet-named "Coleridge"—a man of "commanding" brain, a brain, however, which could never be induced to give the word of command. The wonderful dreams "Coleridge" extemporised in obscure bar-parlours, the flights of angels that ascended and descended the bright rays of his talk, the wisdom of this unwise man! Wasteneys' heart ached sometimes to hear him talk all that fine brain and beautiful spirit into the air. And the irony of so-called success and so-called failure was revealed to him as he reflected that, but for the divine accident of "Kubla Khan," the real Coleridge had been forgotten as his poor nick-named "Coleridge" will be forgotten. Yes! Coleridge's was a narrow escape indeed! And how kind, after all, is the judgment of the world that will forgive all for one handful of strange rhyme.

On the night of his introduction to the reader,

Wasteneys had dined alone, and, the unaccustomed loneliness weighing upon him, he had suddenly thought of "Coleridge." Knowing too well where that divine gasometer was always to be found about ten in the evening, he had sauntered out to a certain old-fashioned tavern in the neighbourhood of Covent Garden, once perhaps the resort of polite wits in days long past, from which days externally it still preserved a certain distinction—the kind of distinction that belongs to a ripe Stilton—but now a sad, silly place of joyless drinking and rotting epileptic brains.

Wasteneys was too good for the place, as indeed was "Coleridge," but, having once been taken there by accident and met "Coleridge," he had sometimes dropped in to meet him again. "Coleridge" kept on there from old habit, a habit begun in the better days of the house. It was indeed his club. His letters came there, and a certain leather chair in the chimney corner was tacitly regarded as his private library. There he wrote his letters, received his friends, and occasionally dozed over a well-thumbed classic; and I am glad to be able to add

that "Coleridge" was always treated with great respect. Poor and shabby as he was, thought had thrown over him its indefinable distinction. He was received with a deference similar to that which we involuntarily pay to the humblest priest. Though irreclaimably devoted to gin-and-water, he was none the less recognised as, shall I say, an unfrocked priest of the humanities.

Wasteneys shouldered his way through a phalanx of men drinking at an outer bar, and emerged on a quaint inner room, where prints of dead actors and old play-bills looked down upon the throng of men and women drinking and talking in knots in a thick atmosphere of tobacco smoke. Only one chair in the room was vacant. "Coleridge" had not yet arrived. Wasteneys presumed to occupy the chair, pending his arrival.

Looking round the room, he was glad to find that he knew no one. To-night the place filled him with more than his usual disgust and pity. So this was pleasure! he thought to himself as he looked around: this—pleasure! Fancy anyone taking this for—pleasure. As a matter of fact, there was

perhaps no one in that room who did. Surely it was not those plain, worn-out, patched-up women. Surely it was not those heavy-eyed, flushed, unfathomably melancholy men. Why then did they come here day after day, night after night? What was the spell beneath the unutterable dreariness? Heaven knows! Perhaps they had begun going there because someone had told them that there the nightingale of pleasure might be heard singing towards midnight. Sometimes, maybe, they had thought they had heard it—and so came and came in the hope of hearing it again. Thus a deferred hope had developed a confirmed habit—and a habit is enough reason.

As Wasteneys watched them, fascinated, his imagination saw them in shuddering and revolting forms. Sometimes he saw them as animal symbols of horrible vices, leering, slithering creatures, with reptile and hoggish forms. He watched diseases genially shaking hands with a fearful unconsciousness of what they were, drunkards who never dreamed they were "drunkards"; women who still spoke, and even thought, of themselves

as women—creatures unspeakably unattractive, to whom silly old men, bald and ape-like, gibbered senile compliments with horrible airs of boyhood.

Wasteneys turned his face from them, overcome with nausea of the spirit, and took a book from his pocket, as in an infected place one goes through the streets with a pomander of purifying spices at one's nostrils. It was a strange book indeed to be reading in that place, and it was in his pocket by an accident of forgetfulness. He had bought it a day or two before merely for its format. It was a particularly beautiful little edition of "The Pilgrim's Progress"!

Owing to his early Catholic training, he had never read it as a child, nor, till this moment, had it since fallen in his way. He opened it with some curiosity. Had the book, he was wondering, any spiritual message for a modern man, for a man like him? He opened it at random, and one of those things happened which had happened so often in his reading that he had grown to be an almost serious consultant of the *sortes*

literarum. This was the passage that first met his eye:

> "Thou didst faint at first setting out, when thou wast almost choked in the Gulf of Despond; thou diddest attempt wrong ways to be rid of thy burden, whereas thou shouldest have stayed till thy Prince had taken it off: Thou didst sinfully sleep and loose thy choice thing: Thou wast also almost persuaded to go back, at the sight of the Lions; and when thou talkest of thy Journey, and of what thou hast heard and seen, thou art inwardly desirous of vain-glory in all that thou sayest or doest."

He put the book down. His eyes were suddenly smitten with a gust of tears, like an April window. Had this old book a message for his modern heart?—a message for a man like him? Had it *not?* His foul surroundings became instantly more than ever insupportable. He rose to leave the place; but, as he did so, the proprietress, who had hitherto been absent, a painted fungus of a woman in black satin, came forward, smiling with horrible cordiality. Did he expect Mr. ——? Had he not heard the sad news? Mr. —— had died suddenly yesterday morning, in the act of dressing.

"'Coleridge' dead?" exclaimed Wasteneys, "poor old 'Coleridge' dead? That's too bad!" and he turned and looked at his chair affectionately. Then

suddenly—"Mrs. ——, will you sell me this chair? Have it taken upstairs at once. No one here must ever sit in his chair again!"

The proprietress assented to his whim, and, having learnt the day of the funeral, Wasteneys went out into the street.

"To think of it—'old Coleridge'—dead!" he repeated to himself as he walked back to his rooms.

And then there came back to him the solemn sentences which for the moment the news had driven from his mind: "Thou diddest attempt wrong ways to be rid of thy burden. . . . Thou didst sinfully sleep and loose thy choice thing." Sorrow had made him superstitious—a not uncommon effect of sorrow; and it seemed to him worth thinking that he had read those words in "Coleridge's" chair. What if "Coleridge's" dead hand had turned the pages and invisibly pointed to that passage!

"Thou diddest attempt wrong ways to be rid of thy burden. Thou didst sinfully sleep and loose thy choice thing."

"It is quite true," he said to himself.

And old "Coleridge" was dead! Why should he have had the impulse to go to that place just on this particular night? He had not been there for weeks. Was not this another *warning?* Warnings had been coming to him of late. Even silly little women had turned prophetesses, and gravely told him that he was wasting his life. Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings! So he pondered as he walked homewards—and then suddenly the unconscious need of weeks found expression. Looking at his watch, he saw that there was still time to catch the last train to his country home. A great longing for green leaves, the stars and the fresh country night, had come upon him. He suddenly realised that he had long been choking for that pure air, and it seemed to him that to sleep another night in London would stifle him. So it was that, an hour and a half afterwards, the train had set him down in the moonlight of a Surrey common.

O, the clean moon, and all the silent trees!

CHAPTER VI.

A MOON-BATH.

WASTENEYS walked the two moonlit miles of country road to his old home in an ecstacy of purification.

"Yes ! nature is moral," he said to himself, "nature is terribly pure and sane. But how sweet to be pure and sane !"

He lifted up his face into the moonlight, bathing and bathing it in the clean and holy light. The moon and he seemed to be the only waking beings in the world. In soft lines of repose the earth lay beneath the moon like a sleeping woman, tenderly veiled in mist and shadow. The moon seemed to be taking care of the world. Dreaming shapes of hill and wood, himself and the moon. O the clean moon !

Wasteneys had been born with a face constitutionally pure—and he still came, as a line in one of his poems expressed it, "with a pure face from a

thousand sins!" The reason, of course, was that he had never been able to take "sin," so-called, seriously—just as he could not have seriously over-eaten himself. He had, it is true, experimented with various "sins," which had a reputation for inducing forgetfulness, as one tries the authenticated medical specifics for affections of the nerves. But to take "sin" seriously! Why, he would as soon have thought of substituting a sleeping-draught for his wine at dinner.

Yet bad medicines, in addition to doing no good, do harm as well, and Wasteneys was obliged to admit that his experiments in spiritual medicine had resulted in a certain spiritual deterioration; almost humorously empirical though they had been. His spiritual constitution had been impaired, his spiritual complexion *had* suffered. So again and again he bathed his face in the moon. To himself his face felt grimy with sensual living. Too seldom of late had it been bathed from within with the bright stream of high thoughts, too seldom bathed from without with the cleansing radiance of seriously beautiful things.

He seemed to feel it growing cleaner as he washed it in that vestal light. As a boy he had thought of the moon as an amorous goddess. To-night her face was the face of a nun. So nature, having no ascertainably definite meaning, means all things to us all. Once the moon had seemed pale with passion, to-night she was pale with purity: for to-night Wasteneys was passionate to be pure!

O, the clean moon!

CHAPTER VII.

"AND O, YE FOUNTAINS, MEADOWS, HILLS AND GROVES."

NEXT morning Wasteneys was up as early as the young man in Gray's "Elegy." With what eager steps he brushed the dew away! He was as impatient as the Eastern king for the purifying river: the puryifying river of the morning air.

He had looked carefully at his face, as he dressed in the strange light of the summer dawn. Yes! The moonlight had helped. As he had stepped from his bath he was almost boisterous with moral determination. "I feel as if I could fight all the gods and all the devils!" he cried aloud.

"You will have an opportunity, never fear," whispered a cautious voice within his soul.

His eagerness swept him before long to the glittering freshness of a green hill, whence he could look with pathos and exaltation upon his own home, from

the chimneys of which there curled as yet no early-rising smoke. The country side lay as still and sleepy as last night in the moonlight, and the sun was as yet the only living thing at work. Wasteneys realised how much the purity of country air comes of solitude, of having the world to oneself. So soon as human figures began to move about the village, Wasteneys took his eyes from the village of Wasteneys, and sought deeper recesses of the morning.

The hawthorn was hanging on the hedges, and to a man sad and sinful from the town, it was heart-breaking to listen to the birds. The least bit of a bird seemed to be an emperor of joy. O, the lovers in the hedges—the calls—the answers!

"Bè quick—
Bè quick—
Bè quick—
Quick!
Bè quick!
Sweet!
Sweet!
Sweet!
Sweet—i—ki!
Sweet—i—ki!
Sweet—i—ki!
Chuck—chuck
Twe-ey—Twe-ey—Twe-ey."

It seemed centuries since Wasteneys had heard a bird sing. In fact he had almost forgotten that there were birds.

Wherever his eye turned, or his ear listened, he was met with the rectitude and chastity of nature! Indeed, nature was almost self-righteous in her asceticism. How business-like she was about her beauty; how methodical with her flowers. It was wonderful to think that not once in all the ages had she missed bringing in the hawthorn at its due season, not once disappointed mankind of the cuckoo. Punctually each year the wild-rose had bloomed, punctually faded and fallen on the grass, punctually the nightingale had sung. Not once had the moon failed to pass melodiously from silver change to change, nor was there any recorded year in which the trees had neglected to bud, the birds to build, or the swallows to fly south.

All around him Wasteneys watched each natural thing strenuously doing its appointed work. For no private grief might the law of gravitation leave its task, nor any natural law halt a moment to gratify some personal whim.

He beheld nature as the great martinet, and, with something of shame, he asked himself: How was he taking his place in this vast harmony? He did not shirk the answer:

"Because of a woman's face," he said to himself, "or rather because you cannot look upon it all day— it is, you know, somewhere beautiful in the world, that should be enough!—you have thrown all the purpose of your life to the winds, you have allowed your faculties to rust, you have mocked at your ideals, you have lost yourself."

CHAPTER VIII.

EASTER.

As Wasteneys returned home, absorbed in such self-examination, he was aroused by the ringing of church bells. It was Sunday. He had forgotten. There was, too, in the ringing an unusual joyfulness. Then he remembered that it was Easter morning. And, with the remembrance, he thought almost for the first time of an old friend to whom always on his rare visits home he hastened to pay his respects. Wasteneys came of an old Catholic family. For this loyalty to the old faith, his family had suffered much in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and because his ancestors had hidden priests in a certain ingenious chamber still shown to curious visitors, Wasteneys was a comparatively poor man to-day. But the family had remained faithful throughout all their trials, and no day of all those years had

passed without some hand placing flowers on the altar of the little chapel hidden away among the Elizabethan gables, which had proved a spiritual refuge, too, for the handful of peasantry who also adhered to the ancient way of faith. There had never been a time when there had been no chaplain at Wasteneys, and though Pagan Wasteneys had long since abandoned the creed of his fathers, he still kept up that tradition: partly from reverence to the memory of his mother, who, after a long widowhood, had died six years before, partly because he felt a spiritual obligation not to deprive his dependents of their immemorial altar, and perhaps mainly for love of the old father, under whose eye his young mind had opened, and whose beautiful old face was as necessary in his thought of home as the old home itself.

During his mother's lifetime, Wasteneys had concealed from her the intellectual change that early made it impossible for him to give more than an external adherence to the Christian faith; but on her death, he had firmly confessed himself to Father Selden.

The old man knew his pupil better than Wasteneys knew himself, and, with the tact of his church, he had refrained from interfering with what he regarded—with the sanction of long experience—as one of those processes in the wayward development of the human soul, which, in certain natures, are best left to work themselves out.

"My son," he had said as a conclusion to their talk, "I believe it is God's will that you should wander in this way. For some natures it is necessary that they should wander long in the wilderness, so that when at last they do come home, they know indeed that it is home. You may have far to go, my poor boy. It is better, perhaps, that you set out early upon your pilgrimage, that you may the sooner come back home. I shall pray for you quietly here, and wait your return. I do not fear for you. You belong to God. More than many you were born His child. You cannot escape His love."

These words had often come back to Wasteneys during these last sad years. Year followed year, but the father's prophecy seemed further and further

from fulfilment. Father Selden had not failed to note the later change in his pupil, a change far more serious than a mere intellectual change. Partly divining the reason, he knew that some emotional process was at work, and he welcomed it—fearing it at the same time. Religion has nothing, in the end, to fear from human reason. It has much more to fear or hope from human love. But Father Selden was more glad than fearful.

"If he loves a woman," he said to himself, "he must end by loving God." He never in all that time revealed to Wasteneys any sign of anxiety or impatience. Nor indeed was his anxiety great. The way might seem long, but the end was sure. In the security of his age, he often felt a divine pity for the young life struggling there in the maze of existence, turning hither and thither, breathless, bewildered, almost heart-broken, apparently with no clue to the way, no hint of the meaning of it all. But, while he pitied, the old man smiled, seeing with clear eyes from the hill of his vision, that those very mistakes, those wrong turnings, that seemed so irremediable, were surely bringing him

nearer and nearer to the one way out, the way of the spirit.

Meanwhile, he said little to Wasteneys, beyond an occasional friendly exhortation, given with one of those lovely smiles which had made Wasteneys as a little boy think of his face as the very gate of Heaven. Once when accidentally he had come upon Wasteneys in a moment of deep sadness, he had put his hand on his shoulder.

"Is the way long, my son? Fear not, you are safe. You follow a light you cannot see. I can see it for you. Be brave. You will understand some day."

And Wasteneys had bowed his head, and thanked him with a pressure of the hand.

All this came back to him with great force, as he hastened home. Father Selden would be in the chapel at this moment, with the tiny band of the country faithful around him. Wasteneys determined to slip in and take his place in a small gallery at the back of the chapel, where he could remain unseen. As he entered, the exquisite little organ—one of the oldest in England—was singing like

many nightingales the resurrection of Christ; and his heart gave a strange bound of joy as the beautiful old words fell upon his ear:

> "Dic, nobis, Maria, quid vidisti in via?
>
> Sepulcrum Christi viventis et gloriam vidi resurgentis."

The chapel was filled with the breath of spring flowers, but it was not the music and the perfume that most touched his heart. They were not so sweet or so pure as the old man's face at the altar, and from these simple hearts about him there was rising an incense of adoring faith which made him sigh and bury his face in his hands.

For all these Christ had risen. For him only He still slept on in the unopening tomb.

In a dream he listened to the chapter which to all present but to him was the veritable history of a divine event. In a dream the hymn filled the little chapel:

> "O Filii et Filiæ,
>
> Rex celestis, Rex gloriæ!
> Morte surrexit hodie,
> Alleluia."

And presently he heard the reproof of Thomas:

> "Vide, Thoma, vide latus,
> Vide pedes, vide manus;
> Noli esse incredulus.
> Alleluia."

Something deeper, something nobler, than reason rose up against his brains. Why did he still doubt? Why did he refuse this revelation to which the innermost soul of him mysteriously responded? "Noli esse incredulus."

Reason!

Reason? Was it the life of the reason that he had been living these last five years? Was it at the dictate of reason that he had thrown aside all the serious purpose of his life? What part had reason in such a possession as that to which, from the first moment of *revelation*, he had given unquestioning assent and service? The world was full of beautiful faces, full of noble women; why among all should he fix his choice upon one face, one woman, that could never be his, and reject all the rest? Was this reason? Reason had, over and over again, spoken to him in vain. For some-

thing had told him that here he knew better than reason, that this passion was subject to a higher, more mysterious, sanction. And the instinct which bade him hold to his dream of human love in spite of reason, was the same instinct that was appealing to him this morning in the name of the Divine Love. He had accepted the lesser revelation, in spite of reason. Could he reject the greater on a pretence which had been unequal to dismissing the lesser? Even reason itself protested against the anomaly.

Ah, could he but see the face of God as clearly as he could see that face which was with him night and day, the face which rose up in the music, and in the breath of the flowers. Could it be that it was this face that hid from him the face of God?

Father Selden was secretly very happy at Wasteneys' coming home in this way and at this season. Accustomed, too, to read the visible signs of the soul in the face, he saw something in Wasteneys' face which seemed to tell him that his prophecy was slowly fulfilling itself. But of this he said nothing to his pupil. Perhaps he was a

thought more tender to him, indefinably infusing into his smile and his hand-grasp an unobtrusive sympathy too subtle to claim a conscious recognition. No more than that. Father Selden was too wise a fisher of men.

"The soul," he used to say, "is like a little frightened bird that hops and hops in sight of the heavenly food, then suddenly flies away; and then as suddenly comes and hops and hops again a little nearer. Some would encourage it with friendly calls, but those only alarm it, and the more we call it the further off it stands, for the soul is very shy. Best to pretend not to notice. Sooner or later, if we leave it alone, it will gain heart and carry off one crumb of the bread of life, and then another."

So it seemed to Father Selden that the soul of Pagan Wasteneys—*animula, vagula, blandula*—was coming nearer and nearer to the heavenly bread, like a timid, long-wandering bird.

CHAPTER IX.

OLD WALLS AND YOUNG DAYS.

NATURE, as we have seen, had straightly impeached Wasteneys with his way of life, his forgetfulness of his old vision of her; religion had appealed to him once more, and at a moment when his ears were open, and his heart prepared to understand, as never in his life before; but nature had not been so stern in her impeachment of him, nor religion so persuasive, as his old home, every stone of which seemed to have been cemented with the earnestness and integrity of serious ancestors, and in every room of which still sang the memories of his happy and beautiful boyhood.

It was not a great or famous house, but all the more significant was the general air of firmness with which it had been set down upon the land. It was

evident that its builders had meant it to endure. Resolution and purpose were in every line of it, distinction in every curve. The more credit to his ancestors, who had been in no way illustrious, but men and women of the common strength and virtue. There were rooms the mere shape and proportions of which were like a chapter in Marcus Aurelius. Wasteneys sat long in them, hoping that something of the force they still stored might pass into him.

Very marvellous is this impressibility of material surroundings to the lives that are lived among them. We build or we furnish a house to suit our own comfort and taste, as it pleases us, or as we must; we die, and our sons inherit us, and live their lives, and maybe add rooms and furniture in accordance with their comfort and their taste, and so generation follows generation; and, meanwhile, from all these lives something impalpable has been passing into the very walls, and, in some mysterious way, the old house has become a reservoir of persuasive, even compelling, influence. One is conscious of this influence even in an old house in which we dwell for

awhile as strangers, and to which we are bound by no ancestry of occupation. How much more powerful must that influence be when the house we inherit has been lived in by men and women of our own blood for centuries. Who has not vibrated to the stored courage in a noble name? An old house that has been bravely and beautifully lived in has just this power of bracing influence; and for a man who possesses such an old home, to come back to it is to connect himself with a hundred currents of energising ancestral force.

Wasteneys felt his old home crying out against him from every corner. Everywhere was purpose, control, order, content. He took refuge from its impeachment in the dim gallery where hung many portraits of his ancestors. With a certain wistfulness he scanned their faces, as though in search of sympathy. Had they all been strong and successful and content? Was there no face amongst them that seemed to hint a prophecy of his own life? One vague sad face there was, the face of a woman, of whom the legend ran that she had died of love; but there was little except her weakness to distinguish

her from the rest. And he was seeking sympathy in no pathetic face of failure; but rather in some proud strong face that plainly told of a world lost which it had not cared to win. Love may be as strong losing as winning, stronger maybe. That face he sought in vain.

Of all the rooms of his old home that thus called upon him to come out of his dream and do his destined work, it was his library, as might be expected, which called to him with the most definite and the most moving voice. There the strenuous intellectual struggles of his boyhood and young manhood had taken place, there he had nobly aspired to follow the great masters in the greatest of all the arts. Their names as he looked round his shelves seemed to-day terribly victorious, and sternly reproachful. He smiled sadly as he recalled the ardour with which he had once echoed another's cry:

> "Oh that my name were numbered among theirs,
> Then gladly would I end my mortal days."

The poet who uttered that cry had indeed succeeded in his desire. His name stood for a fact

in the world of the mind. When it was spoken, it had a definite meaning, like the name of a colour. As Wasteneys' eyes passed from one great name to another, he realised, with a new thrill of ambition and despair, what to make a name really means.

To have lived so forcibly, with such vivid significance, and so to have charged a few handfuls of words with the dynamic potency of your spirit; or maybe to have lived so graciously, with such sweet perfume of living, and so to have impregnated a few handfuls of words with an undying sweetness; that your name alone means all you have done and all you have been: is not all that meant when we put a name on a binding—a name alone?

"Dante." There is no need to explain. There is no need to print the name in full, for fear of mistake, no need to explain that the volume contains the works of Messer Dante Alighieri of Florence—a certain vision in three books. So soon as we see the name we say to ourselves: Beatrice—Florence—Hell—Purgatory—and Heaven. Such beautiful and mighty meanings was a great man able to concentrate in a little name of five letters: the love of woman,

the love of country, the fear of hell, the pains of purgatory, the love of God.

Wasteneys wrote out his own name. Alas! he had not yet made one letter of it! "It is such a long name!" he said, taking shelter in a sad laugh, which was far indeed from real laughter. Such laughter is either the despair or the cowardice of the disappointed spirit.

But he could not laugh, even so superficially as that, when from time to time he took down some classic which he had strenuously read and carefully marked, years before, and found the messages which his youth had left there for his middle age. Ah! how strong that boy had been, how stern of purpose, how pure of heart, how sure of the heavenly vision!

Scattered up and down his books were flowers. They had nothing to do with love. They were keepsakes of the spirit. Wasteneys had long since forgotten their special reference, but their general significance his aching heart well knew. How many spring mornings they stood for, when, wandering through the fields in the early dew, the heavens had opened, and voices of thrilling certitude had

proclaimed to him the spiritual order of the universe. Ah! to be caught up once more by that angelic singing, to wander once more, an inspired boy, up the stairways of the morning star.

> " Sing me a song of a boy that is gone—
> Say can that boy be I ? "

But whence and how had come the change? He was still young, still strong, his heart was still pure, if the surface of his life was—not indelibly—stained.

A woman's face ! A woman's face !

Fool !

CHAPTER X.

THE MEADOW OF REMEMBRANCE.

THROUGH three of the morning weeks of the year Wasteneys lived in the lustral solitude of nature, and meanwhile he gradually recovered an old understanding with her, an almost forgotten relationship. As a boy, ten years before, it was not indeed as a tonic, a spiritual regimen, that he had sought her. Then it had seemed enough reason for life to be allowed to look in her face, to gaze into it in those long trances of pantheistic ecstasy, which, as he thought back upon his life, seemed to be the most complete moments of existence. There is that union between the universe and its unit, as of mother and child, which is entirely absorbing and satisfying. The child asks only the mother's breast, only her smile as he lies feeding there. So there are

certain temperaments which are still so filially attached to the great Mother, that her love and her beauty are all they need. The mystic relation between them and what we call nature suffices them. They are so filled with "the All" that they are independent of the contributory unit. Anchorites of green loneliness, monks of the morning star, a great dream has set them free from the lesser dependencies of humanity. As a boy, Wasteneys had known that mystic rapport with nature in rare completeness. Now, as he found himself regaining it, he realised with a pang how complete, too, the intervening estrangement had been.

Now he saw that all these years during which he had laid up his treasure in one human face, nature had been to him as half-heeded spectacular scenery for the human drama. When the great stage had been empty of human figures, he had been overborne with an oppressive, almost terrifying, loneliness. And once the lonely summer night had seemed like a room full of friends. But this noble friendship was being day by day more and more restored to him. Again he felt, or thought he felt,

that the complete human life is lived as a unit. The man alone, and yet not alone; the woman alone, and yet not alone—and the universe. Again he felt, or thought he felt, mysterious sustenance streaming into him out of the air. He was the mother's child again. The human prodigal had come back home. Lost satisfactions were his once more, complete moments filled with deep content. There were hours, even days, in which he felt as whole-heartedly at home in the world as a child, hours and days unmarred by that human ache. Would the time come when that ache would cease for ever, when once more life's standard of value would be changed for him, and the Whole become again what the part too long had been? Would he ever regain his lost place in the great harmony, fulfil himself, do his small share in the cosmic work, with joyous efficiency—as a bird sings, or a tree grows?

All this time there had been one meadow which he had not entered. It was a meadow secluded with hawthorn hedges, half a mile or so from his house. It swept down from a green up-

land to the banks of the trout-stream that loitered its osiered course through that country-side. In all these walks, whenever Wasteneys approached it, he took some devious way to avoid it. He had vowed that he would walk in that meadow no more, that he dared not walk in it. For a flower was growing there to which the hawthorn was scentless. But he said to himself one day that it were better to go and stand in that meadow, and smell that flower, now in the new strength of his soul; lest the power of their enchantments might grow with his avoidance of them. Anything we dare not look at must in the end conquer us. Yes! he would go to the meadow, and smell the strange flower again, and his heart would ache, but it would not fail.

So, early one morning, Wasteneys went up to his meadow through the freshness and the stillness. His heart beat and he quickened his steps as he neared it. Something whispered that his soul had meant to come here all the time—that he would go on coming here for ever; that nature was not enough, that all nature, and more besides, was in

that little blue flower. Little blue flower which fills all the morning sky with fragrance. Little blue flower filled with all the ache and sweetness of human hearts.

An hour afterwards Wasteneys lay face down in the grass. The Great Mother pressed close to him for comfort; she flooded his sad figure with sunlight; her morning breezes pressed cool hands against his brow; little birds came near and peeped and sang; all the mighty morning begged to be his friend. But Wasteneys lay on unheeding, face down in the grass, crying like a child.

* * * * * *

That night found him back again in his London rooms. In his desk was a beautiful locked manuscript volume, to which half humorously he had given the name of "The Sad Heart of Pagan Wasteneys." It was a sort of intermittent diary of his possession. About midnight he slid aside the moonstone which masked the curiously contrived

lock, and added this lyric to the other sad writing in the book:

> "For lack and love of you, love,
> I pine the long days through;
> I waste the powers
> Of the rich hours,
> For lack and love of you.
>
> "For lack and love of you, love,
> All life is grown untrue;
> O, I squander
> And I wander,
> For lack and love of you.
>
> "For lack and love of you, love,
> I grow myself untrue;
> I am drowning,
> Drowning, drowning,
> For lack and love of you."

As he closed the book and turned out the lamp, a strange thought struck him: Was this lyric quite, absolutely, simply true? Was this passion really all it had seemed to him? Did it really mean all it had seemed to mean? The thought filled him with a curious wonder. So might a prisoner one day rub his eyes and say: "Am I really in prison?"

That he had returned to town thus in a panic of loneliness must not be taken to mean that the

last three weeks had been in vain. Spiritual changes are seldom completed all at once. One such emotional mood as that through which Wasteneys had just passed is not sufficient. Many such may be needed, and meanwhile it may seem to the spectator, and even to the soul itself, that no change is taking place. Yet in the darkness the change is surely being wrought. Wasteneys came back to town to seek it once more as an anodyne, but he was not the same man that had left it three weeks before. Already, it had lost its power to harm him. Already a new principle of life was moving in him. Vital purposes long asleep were dimly astir. But of these he was to be unconscious for a long time to come. Life has a way of keeping us in the dark as to its purpose with us till that purpose is accomplished.

CHAPTER XI.

ADELINE WOOD.

THERE was one woman who was really good for Wasteneys. Adeline Wood was a little West-country girl who had felt herself one too many in a big family of girls, and had managed, with no little romantic excitement and personal courage, to detach herself and come to London. How much is romance indebted to trivial barriers for its opportunities! Many thousand travellers enter London every day by the great doors of its railway termini. They scatter themselves in hansoms and hotel omnibuses in one direction and another; and they transact their business without a thought that—this is Fairyland! Who has not known men to whom Rome is but a market-town, and Antioch a city of mulberry-trees and tobacco plants? To Adeline Wood, romance had always expressed itself, firstly: as London; secondly, and

with multiple suggestiveness, as all that might happen in London. To Adeline Wood London was Bagdad, whose first nights were Arabian Nights; and whose streets were peopled with grand viziers in disguise. Just to have lodgings in London—lodgings and a London latchkey—was a sufficiently romantic beginning. I don't pretend to say why. The potent fancies of human beings, even little provincial girls, go deeper than reason.

Adeline Wood was one of those eager bachelor girls who starve themselves to buy books they cannot else afford, who carry camp stools to the pits of theatres, who sacrifice a mere lunch to see a Bond Street exhibition. Probably her zest in these things was chiefly the zest in being free. The emancipated slave naturally revels in being able to do *anything* of his or her own free-will. One must have been such a slave as Woman to realise the excitement of such rudimentary freedom. Such has been the bondage of the English provincial girl for hundreds of years, that to gain at last the freedom to earn a hundred pounds a year, by her own labour, thus foregoing many a comfort and elegance of her prosperous

West-country home, but thus ransoming her own body and soul, may well have seemed a notable triumph not merely for herself, but for her sex.

Adeline Wood might have fought and won the battle of sex, differently; merely in fact with the weapon of a beauty which was perhaps just a little too intellectual. But the conquests so far within her reach had not been to her mind. Marriage seemed nothing like so romantic to her, as having two little rooms of her own in London, and making her own living by the delicate craft of book-binding.

She was one of a little band of men and women inspired by the influence of a certain master-craftsman, who brought something like a religious enthusiasm to his craft, and taught his followers that the humblest artificers in the temple of art participated in their degree in the sacerdotal office of beauty. Little Adeline Wood went about her work like an acolyte carrying sacred vessels. She was very happy—a little perhaps as nuns are happy; a happiness which, like all true happiness, included a certain austerity, and discipline, and watchful aspiration, of life. It was wonderful what pleasure and excitement she extracted

from every little incident and circumstance of her existence. So much of our pleasure, far more than we know, comes of an unspoilt appetite. Even her simple little meals had an air about them. Selection is, as we know, a most important formative principle of every art. It is especially important to the art of living. Thus, poverty, with its enforced careful choice among pleasures, is a fine sharpener of the taste. There is no such connoisseur as your poor connoisseur. Poverty keeps the eye eagerly clean for quality; for, while quality in quantity is beyond its reach, it may still hope to possess itself of an occasional example of "quality." One really fine thing! In that you have the essential excellence and wonder. Long galleries of collections do not go deeper than that. If you possess one really fine piece of old silver, the richest collection of old silver in the world does not really surpass you. They have more of the same thing—but you have the essential unit of quality. Multiplication is not distinction. Indeed, it tends precisely in the other direction.

This merely in illustration of Adeline Wood, from whom Wasteneys found a letter awaiting him on his

return to town. Of course, hers was not the only letter awaiting him. There was one from Myrtle Rome too, beginning " My King ! " as Myrtle's really beautiful and very romantic letters always began. Of Myrtle more later on. Wasteneys laid aside that picturesque spray of womanhood to read Adeline's austere little note of invitation to tea—tea and a new book-binding.

The thought of Adeline was like the cool evening star rising over the hot earth. Why had he never made love to Adeline? You could not see her handwriting without understanding what a wonderful wife she would make. Well, perhaps, it was that a man would need to be a very good husband to be worthy of Adeline; and then Wasteneys had never thought of marrying any woman.

Wasteneys had met Adeline at his cousin's, Lady Lucy Silchester's. Lady Lucy was one of those noble ladies, who flirt with Grub Street and send cards of invitation to popular authors they do not know. That is she was "literary." In her kind shallow heart she believed herself a poet. It was really a pity that she should have contracted this illusion,

for it made intercourse with her a little precarious. Wasteneys had suffered much from her sad little manuscripts, and it was his fear of them that made him a rarer visitor than he would otherwise have been; for he liked his cousin, with her pretty head and bright popular ways.

In support of her literary character, Lady Lucy filled her rooms with an indiscriminate collection of men and women in one way or another living the sad life of the pen. With a genuine appreciation of good literature, she would yet surprise you at times with an equally sincere enthusiasm for bad. Her taste was what is known as "uncertain"—and of this uncertainty she was herself, one could sometimes note, nervously conscious. Therefore, she often wrote to Wasteneys for his "opinion" on this or that new book, and he smiled sometimes to see how daintily she would reproduce it at her next afternoon.

Her acquaintance with Adeline Wood had come of Lady Lucy's following the fashion in book-binding, and she had taken a genuine fancy for the girl, with her gentle, distinguished, and somewhat haughty air.

Among Wasteneys' letters had been a heart-

breaking appeal from Lady Lucy to help her with a tea on the morrow, and, as Wasteneys had neglected her somewhat callously for a long time, he decided to give ear to it. Besides, it was not unlikely that Adeline might be there.

His first thought on entering Lady Lucy's drawing room next afternoon was that Adeline was there. She sent him one of her long sweet smiles across a sea of talkers through which it was plainly impossible to swim on the instant to her side. Indeed, Lady Lucy made that clear at once.

"Don't think you are going off to sit in a corner with Adeline," she said, knowing the friendship between the two. "You have to make up your arrears with me first."

A great book by a profound and sorrowful master had just been published. Lady Lucy asked Wasteneys' opinion of it, as though it had been a new brand of cigarettes.

"Do you think it right to speak of it here?" he said—and he looked round.

"Of course, I know it is very deep," said Lady Lucy, not quite understanding.

Then her duties as hostess called her away, and Wasteneys found himself listening in a dream to an American lady journalist who was asking him his opinion of "pessimism." Pessimism! It was like asking what one thought of Mr. Stephenson's wonderful invention of the steam-engine. However!

"I should define pessimism," said Wasteneys gravely, "as making the best of it."

"And saying the worst," added a neighbouring talker, one of those good-natured persons who love to cast light upon other people's jokes.

"I think that very clever," said the American lady, not in the least comprehending. "Do you mind writing it down for me?" and she produced a card case and asked Wasteneys to write it upon one of her cards.

"It is always such a pleasure to meet men of genius," she added.

At last by a daring and somewhat shameless piece of social strategy Wasteneys shot across to Adeline.

"At last!" he said.

"Well?" said Adeline, meaning, "what news since

we last met?" and then without waiting for him to reply she said, looking critically into his face,

"You look better!"

"Better?"

"Then gooder—so to speak."

"I've been watching flowers grow and listening to birds singing."

"I'm glad."

"Why?"

"Because it's good for you. I wish you would do it oftener."

"Won't looking at book-bindings do as well?"

"Are you coming to-morrow?"

"Of course."

"What were you saying to that lady over there?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because I noticed that curious smile which comes over your face when you have said something absurd."

"Well, she asked me—think of it—what I thought of pessimism."

"And what did you say?"

"I said—I should define pessimism as—making the best of it."

"Poor soul! Had she a notion of what you meant?"

"She asked me to copy it down for her."

"It was true though," said Adeline a little sadly—then turning to Wasteneys, "Why aren't you a pessimist?"

"I'm going to be."

"You are really going to make *the best* of it."

"What nonsense are you two talking?" suddenly broke in Lady Lucy, who was not so happy with her other guests as she tried to appear.

"Adeline has just made a bad pun, for my spiritual good," laughed Wasteneys.

"Well, I hope it will not be made in vain," said Lady Lucy. "Have you seen Adeline's latest binding?"

"No, I am to see it to-morrow."

And with the buzz of such small talk this chapter may as well end.

CHAPTER XII.

"THE LOVE-LETTERS OF THE KING."

Adeline had two pretty old-fashioned rooms high up, overlooking one of the old London squares, and it was one of the joys of her life that she did her work under an Adams ceiling. Her rooms, simple as they were, gave one that pleasure which rooms expressive of a refined occupant with individual taste always give. Everything in them meant a personal preference, and the whole formed a symbol of the inner life of a girl, who in everything had dared to choose for herself. It was autobiography in the form of carefully selected furniture, pictures and books. Nothing was irrelevant. Adeline, too, had a way of discovering pictures no one else had, and framing them for a few shillings as no one else framed theirs. Just as clever women can make a hat for half-a-crown that sets all their

rich friends asking who is their distinguished milliner, so Adeline contrived to give to her little rooms an air which the rooms of the rich, by the comparative indifference to single details which comes of abundance, seldom attain. Her little tea-table seemed like no other tea-table. Old silver and old china far more costly might fail to give so exquisite an impression; and Adeline's bread and butter! Well—no doubt it was because she always cut it herself. There is nothing which so rewards a personal exertion as bread and butter. The way in which one cuts bread and butter is an unfailing test of one's delicacy. Nothing is so eloquent of the division between the labouring and the cultured classes as the relative thickness of their bread and butter. Adeline's bread and butter seemed rather to belong to the world of spirit than to the world of matter. It had the immateriality of certain flowers. Her tea also was the very soul of tea.

When Wasteneys came on the morrow, the little drawing-room seemed unusually fresh and sunny.

"It is so good for me to be here, Adeline," he said.

Adeline smiled, as, having warmed the tea-pot for a due space, she poured the hot water upon the fragrant leaves.

In the room were two great presses, picturesque engines of her art, recalling the early printers, in which the bindings underwent certain mysterious processes; and in an alcove were shelves full of shining tools. A roll of coloured skins, some day to become bindings, lay upon the floor.

"It is truly a sacerdotal art," said Wasteneys, as he admiringly examined Adeline's new binding. "There is no satisfaction equal to having made something beautiful literally with one's hands. The sensitive absorption of the work alone is a great reward. You must be happy, Adeline."

"But mine is such a tiny art," said Adeline; "what is it compared with an art like yours? If to bind a book is such a joy, what must it be to write one!"

"Ah! there you mistake—an art is a joy to practise the more it is a physical craft. Literature is only a handicraft in that it employs handwriting,

which many literary men abhor. Personally, I love handwriting, and I find it difficult to think till my pen is in my hand. For the rest, literature—so far as so humble a writer can speak of it—is an art practised either in a state of exhausting delirium, or still more exhausting *ennui*. And even the mere material, in the case of personal writers, is costly to the point of tragedy. Everything that is really written is written in human blood—either that of the writer, or that of his victim."

"In whose blood have you been writing lately?" asked Adeline, quizzically.

"To tell the truth," answered Wasteneys, laughing, "just before I came to you, I found in my desk a half-forgotten manuscript written in my own! It is only a fragment, but it rather interested me to read it again, and, knowing your indulgence, I have brought it with me. Shall I read it now, or shall we keep it for the *crême de menthe?*"

Tea with Adeline, as they both knew, always prolonged itself into dinner at a little Italian restaurant, where distinguished poverty dined delicately on a few shillings—and what survived in

Wasteneys of the artist was never so happy as when, with the coming of coffee and cigarettes, Adeline allowed him to read her his latest manuscript. Men write their books *to* many women by accidental association, but there is usually one woman *for* whom they are written. The woman *to* whom you write has probably no interest in literature at all, and she probably considers you an eccentric creature who will write bewildering books about her, which even she, the subject of them, cannot understand. The artist cares nothing for what she thinks. He would as little think of asking his three-year-old child her opinion on his last cradle-song. The woman who inspires is of no importance; it is the woman who understands that is the real muse.

Now, as I have implied, there was no sentiment between Adeline Wood and Pagan Wasteneys, yet, all the same, it was true that everything he wrote was written for her—for the simple reason, maybe, that no line of it was written *to* her. To win her praise was his idea of success. The praise of the critical journals was nothing like so important to

him, though, as a matter of fact, it was more within his reach; for the laurels of Adeline Wood were not easy to win.

"Let us keep it for the *crême de menthe,*" said Adeline, "but you can tell me the title now."

"'The Love-Letters of the King,'" said Wasteneys.

"A picturesque title," said Adeline, "a little too picturesque."

"A title is in the nature of a poster," said Wasteneys, "and must be flamboyant to catch the eye of the mind."

"Quite true!" said Adeline, "and I confess your poster is so effective that I think you had better read it to me now."

"No!" said Wasteneys, firmly, "let us wait till the *crême de menthe.* That is the truly critical hour of the day, and I desire your most searching criticism, Adeline. You might praise me weakly, if I read to you now."

"Just tell me, then, what sort of a thing it is."

"It is a fairy tale."

"A fairy tale! I see, you mean—autobiography?"

" All real writing is autobiography," said Wasteneys modestly.

*   *   *   *   *   *

" Well, don't you think it is time to begin reading ? " asked Adeline, an hour or two afterwards in a secluded corner of prandial candle-light.

" All right ! " said Wasteneys, diving abruptly into the pearl-fishery of his manuscript.

*   *   *   *   *   *

" It was May in the King's garden, and the King sat there towards the close of the afternoon, with his admiring court about him. He was still young to look on, but there was that sadness in his dark handsome face which tells that the heart is old before its time. No one knew how sorrow had come to the King, but to eyes accustomed to read the human soul there was sorrow in all his ways, even in his gayest moments. Such might guess that his half-cynical preoccupation with light pleasures, his absorption in the toys of art and emotion, served only to veil an inner life of a very different serious-

ness. His kingdom was so small that there was nothing for a king to do, except to superintend his architects and the various artists who daily wrought at his palace, in obedience to his learned and innovating fancy. Nothing more serious than that—but idler hours the King spent in such delicate literary trifling as was occupying him and his court this afternoon.

"It had been one of his fancies to revive the fantastic toys of the *cours d'amour*, and he was looked upon by all his court as a master of the arts of literary love. It was one of his fancies to revive the love-letter as a literary form, to use it merely as a mould, as the poet uses the ballade or the sestina, and the experiments he had made in that subtle form had won him high appreciation among *les précieuses* of his court. 'The King's Love-Letters' went from hand to hand in beautifully illuminated copies, and the boudoir of every lady of quality was duly provided with the latest perfumed edition. For gallants and all casuists of the gentle art they were regarded as an indispensable manual. Of course, no one dreamed of attaching to them

any personal human application. It was understood that they were exercises by a master in the difficult art of prose, nothing more; for it was well known that, though the King might occasionally dally with this or that lady of his court, out of courtesy or *ennui*, he was seriously attached to no one—no one, at all events, that anyone knew of.

"To-day the King had written a wonderful new love-letter, and as he languidly read it to his court—a court which in secret he despised—scribes were busy in the background taking down each delicately-chosen and carefully-placed word that fell from his lips.

"When he had finished reading, the court broke out into the customary ecstasies of appreciation. Enthusiastic ladies pressed close to the King and marvelled at his knowledge of the deep heart of love, *petit-maitres* picked out this or that sentence for its masterly this or its miraculous that. No writer of the day equalled the King, said one, in the superb orchestration of prose. This was undeniable, for no one, including king and critic, knew exactly what such praise meant. But it sounded

well—the 'orchestration of prose'!—and there was a murmur of applause.

"An imitative critic thereon ventured to praise a passage where what he might call the oboe of prose for a moment dominated the grander music—a very black-bird of a sentence!

"And there were many more comments of a like nature.

"The King listened and smiled. All the time he was watching the lonely, somewhat bewildered, face of a beautiful young girl. He surmised that she was a stranger at the court, come up from some simple country castle to visit friends in the great world. Her face had caught his eye as he began reading, and he had watched it all the while. It had remained throughout like the face of one who listens to a song in a language he does not understand. Its only change was a deepening perplexity—which seemed meekly to ask the meaning of it all. This troubled young face was the only critic the King heeded. For his sad eyes saw the light of love upon it, the light that was on no other face. Presently, as his flatterers spent themselves and dis-

persed in groups about the garden, he took an opportunity to speak to his silent little critic.

"'All these people have been so kind,' he said, laughing, 'but you have said nothing kind to me.'

"The girl's eyes filled with tears. She had never before spoken to a king, and she was very timid. But, dropping a quaint little country curtsey, she summoned courage to say:

"'It was very beautiful . . . your Majesty—but it was not a love-letter.'

"Then, with the naïve daring of the innocent, she slipped her hand into her bosom and drew out a warm little writing, which she offered to the King to read.

"The King read it gravely, and, as he read it, it was his eyes that filled with tears. When he had finished reading, he folded it reverently, and, giving it back to her, said: 'No, mine was not a love-letter.'

"Then, taking off his hat and bending slightly, he kissed her hand and turned away with a sigh."

* * * * * *

"You have written more than that," said Adeline,

as Wasteneys suddenly ceased reading; "won't you go on?"

"Hadn't I better keep some for next time? Besides, if you don't mind, I would rather not read any more to-night. Let us dine together again to-morrow, and I will read you the rest—that is, so far as it goes; for it is a long way from being finished——"

His face had grown drawn and tired, and his eyes seemed suddenly filled with memories.

"Of course," said Adeline, divining more than he thought. "But tell me this before you go. The King understood because he had really known love once. Is that the meaning?"

"Yes!" said Wasteneys, softly and half to himself, "the King had known love."

"I thought so," said Adeline, with a sigh.

As Wasteneys spoke he saw a vision of a woman—gathering mushrooms in the dawn!

CHAPTER XIII.

"THE LOVE-LETTERS OF THE KING" (continued).

"THE King understood," said Adeline, as dinner neared its close the next evening, and taking up their talk where they had left it, "because he had really known love. Now go on."

"Yes! the King understood," proceeded Wasteneys, "because in a golden box set with moonstones he had five real love-letters. They were very short, and he had come by them in this way.

"One morning rising early, as was his custom, he had walked alone in a dewy upland some little way from his palace, and he had suddenly come upon a beautiful woman gathering mushrooms. For a few moments she did not see the King, and he had time to see how beautiful she was, as she bent down here and there, softly tearing the milk-white

things out of the green grass. She was all in white, save her hair, which was black as——"

"Oh, she had black hair!" interrupted Adeline involuntarily.

"Yes! very black hair!" Wasteneys continued, "and her body was very tall and straight, and her skin white as the pith of a peeled willow wand.

"Presently she saw the King and stopped gathering the mushrooms, looking long at him with great fearless eyes, like a child's. The King had never seen such eyes, and she had never seen such eyes as the King's; so they stood long looking strangely at each other, alone on the uplands in the silence of the morning. And such is the mystery of human hearts, that they knew from that look that they would love each other, and no other, as long as they lived. Then the King laughed, and the woman laughed too, as if they had known each other for years.

"'Do you know that you are stealing the King's mushrooms?' asked the King.

"'Are you the King?'

"'Yes.'

"'The King of all these mushrooms?'

"'Yes—every one!'

"'What then will happen to me?'

"'I will spare your life on one condition—that we sit under yonder tree and eat them together.'

"So the King and the woman laughed like children, while they silently gave their hearts to each other.

"Suddenly the woman looked at him with her child's eyes, and said:

"'Are you a real king?'

"'I think so.'

"'Do you lead great armies, and govern a mighty land?'

"'I have such a little land to govern.'

"'But you should make it great.'

"'Stay with me—and I will be a real king.'

"'Alas! I cannot. I have promised to make another man a king.'

"'But this will I do,' said the woman after a silence. 'I will meet you once a year in this meadow and ask you that question: *Are you a real king?* and once a year I will write you a letter to help you to be a real king.'

"Now, when the woman had gone, the King fell sad on account of those eyes, and spent his time idly with minstrels and such folk, and became from year to year less and less a king. But each year as that day came round, the King went up to the meadow at early dawn, and there was the woman awaiting him—as each year there came a plumed and perfumed messenger bringing a letter to the King.

"This was the first letter: '*I love you.*'

"And the King said: 'This will make me great.'

"This was the second letter: '*I love you.*'

"And the King said: 'I *will* be great.'

"This was the third letter: '*I love you.*'

"And the King said: 'I *can* be great.'

"This was the fourth letter: '*I love you.*'

"And the King said: 'I *must* be great.'

"But on the fifth year there came this letter: '*I must love you no more. I can only love a king.*'

"When the King read the fifth letter he went more wildly with his minstrels and flatterers than ever, living weakly in pleasures that gave him no joy, and in the wine and the harp-playing he strove to forget;

but always the woman's voice went on asking in his soul: 'Are you a real king?'

"All day long he heard his flatterers call him 'King,' and 'King,' and 'King,' and sometimes when the wine was in him their words would seem true, and he would smile foolishly to himself and say: 'I *am* a king!—what is one woman out of all the world?'

"And the harps would answer: 'Thou *art* a king!' and the bugles and the banners would answer: 'Thou *art* a king!' But sometimes the King would snatch himself away from them all in bitter sadness, crying aloud in his soul: 'I am *not* a king.'"

* * * * * *

Wasteneys had come to the end of his manuscript, and there was a long silence. Adeline just placed her hand gently on his for applause; and presently in her soft pure voice she said:

"But, of course, he is a real king in the end. He *must* be a real king . . . mustn't he?" she asked wistfully, as Wasteneys kept silence.

"Oh, of course," said Wasteneys.

CHAPTER XIV.

MERIEL.

WHEN Wasteneys returned home that night, he went to a large old cabinet of beautiful Renaissance workmanship that stood in his room, and pressed a secret spring. A panel slid back and revealed a little shrine of ebony; but, instead of a crucifix, there hung there the miniature of a beautiful girl. Two gold candlesticks stood in front of it, and a china jar filled with white roses. Wasteneys lit the candles and gazed on the face.

The face, I have said, was beautiful, but the more one looked at it the less one regarded its beauty, and the more one became occupied with something indefinably strange in its expression. It was impossible to say exactly what it was; but perhaps it consisted in an unusual combination of unfathomable calm and elemental wildness. Its calm was that

massive calm which seems to give an expression of moral grandeur to certain of the nobler animals, and its wildness was the wildness of woodland things that live free lives under moon and stars. It was not a human face, but was rather a face one might imagine for some serious dryad or nymph of the forest pools; some being midway between gods and men. The fables which have invented such beings are far from being wholly fictions. They symbolise certain half-human types of men and women, who, in the outward seeming of humanity, are really creatures of another element, and are essentially as remote from humanity as, say, a wild bird on the one hand, and a star on the other. Half human, half immortal; man loves them at terrible peril. For a time the humanity in them prevails, and they bring the mortal who has dared to love them a happiness beyond the gift of mortal women; but sooner or later their own element will reclaim them. The swan-maiden will pine for her wings, and the mer-maiden will hear the voices of the deep sea-caves. They are not cruel, they are not kind. They are only different from us.

Wasteneys, indeed, was as yet far from clearly understanding the meaning of the face he worshipped. But understanding is no part of worship—is it not rather the end of worship?

He stood long in adoration of the face.

"O, Meriel! Meriel!" he cried at last. "How I love you!"

Then from a little drawer beneath the picture he took a small packet of letters and read them slowly, with many pauses; for sometimes his eyes were too full of tears, and sometimes the tears rained down his cheeks, and with bent head he sobbed before the image of the woman he loved.

In a luxury of agony he lived over again moment by moment the few brief hours that, speaking merely in terms of time, made the whole history of his love.

The fairy-tale he had read to Adeline, though in some respects symbolic only of the experiences of his spirit, was yet in one respect so externally faithful to his own story that there is hardly need to tell again how he had seen Meriel for the first time.

It had, indeed, come about early one September morning in that meadow near Wasteneys, much as it had happened with the King. Since his boyhood Wasteneys had always included that meadow in his early morning walks, and till that September morning he had always had the meadow to himself.

But that morning he was half startled to find a young and beautiful girl there before him. She carried in her hand a little basket, which she was filling with the new-born mushrooms, plentifully dotted about the grass—the dewiest white in the world. She gathered them eagerly, like a child, and Wasteneys watched her a few moments unobserved. She seemed the very incarnation of morning freshness, and all the terrible magnetism of young life when in April it comes up laughing from the earth in torrents of sunlit blossom. There was the bloom upon her of some superb butterfly that has just awakened from its strange sleep, and stands waving its sumptuous wings. Wasteneys watched her in silent wonder, and to his eyes she seemed supernaturally fair.

Suddenly she seemed to be conscious that she

was not alone, and, looking up, she saw Wasteneys. For a moment or two neither spoke. Wasteneys' breath seemed to fail him, and it was with an almost audible gasp of delight that he first looked into Meriel's great eyes. An expression as of some beautiful frightened animal flashed through them as she looked at Wasteneys, then a reassurance, and then she looked at him with the calm gaze of a child. The silence was only for a brief moment, and yet it seemed to both of them that it had endured for endless time. The look was rather like a long joyful recognition than an introduction. Then both smiled, and Wasteneys spoke.

"Good morning," he said; and Meriel said "Good morning."

To have met in such solitude and silence seemed to make companionship inevitable. The world is so thinly inhabited at seven in the morning that the few who move about it, should their paths cross, cannot ignore each other without affectation. In fact, the choice of such an hour to walk abroad in makes a freemasonry. It implies that this dawn-wanderer is, at all events, nearer to us than the rest

of the world by the operation of one process of selection.

"I am glad you like my mushrooms," said Wasteneys, presently.

"Your mushrooms?"

"Yes."

"You are lord of the manor—is that it?"

"Yes."

"And that is your thrush, eh?"

"Yes."

"Then really I have no right to hear it sing—without your permission?"

"Strictly speaking, I suppose not."

"You could, I suppose, put me in prison then for stealing these mushrooms?"

"Certainly."

"You make me quite frightened."

This heavenly being had a curious boyish humour—a suggestion, absurd as it may sound, of *gaminerie*.

"There is one way out of the difficulty," said Wasteneys, "if you care to take it."

"Oh?"

"That we breakfast together on your stolen mushrooms."

"Without salt?"

"Oh no! exquisitely cooked by my own hand—and some excellent coffee too."

"Here? Are you a magician? Can you make a frying-pan out of the morning air?—and I don't see any coffee growing in the meadow."

"I know where to find both coffee and frying-pan," and, as Wasteneys spoke, he pointed to a little shepherd's hut in a hidden corner of the meadow.

It had been one of his fancies to place it there, and furnish it with kettle and tea-pot and the various utensils and materials necessary, when the fancy took him, to make his own breakfast on his early morning walks. Wasteneys took a key from his pocket, and unlocked the door.

"You are delightful!" said the girl. He had unconsciously struck the chord of wildness to which her nature vibrated.

"Now," said Wasteneys, "while I light the fire, you take this jug and bring some water from the

stream. You will find it down there by those alders at the bottom of the meadow."

"Oh, I know the stream," said Meriel; "haven't I caught trout there for the last month?"

"You have?" said Wasteneys, with admiration; and then added, "for the last month," meaning "and we have been all this time so near, and have never met before!"

But Meriel was already off to the stream, swinging the jug in her hand, and striding like a glad boy.

When she returned, Wasteneys had lit the fire, and sat at the door of the hut peeling the mushrooms.

"Have we any milk?" said Meriel, in a practical voice.

"I'm afraid we haven't."

"I saw a cow just now," said Meriel, smiling, "who would, I think, be glad to give us some. Is she your cow, do you know? Will you give me permission to steal some milk?"

"You can milk!"

"Of course. Let me take that stool, and this jug," and off she went again. Wasteneys heard her

voice calling soothingly to the milk-mother down in the meadow, who by this had begun to low, plaintively reproaching a neglectful herdsman, that by some chance had missed her as he had driven the herd to the milking two hours before.

In a short time Meriel returned with a jug full of warm frothing milk.

"I'm afraid I drank out of the jug," she said. "I can't resist fresh milk—and the poor old thing wanted to give me far more."

Wasteneys was by this occupied with the mushrooms, which were deliciously browning in seas of hissing butter.

"Shall I lay the table?" said Meriel.

"Do," said Wasteneys, as he pointed to a small cupboard, "you will find everything in there."

Already they were strangely at home together.

* * * * * *

"You were right," said Meriel, presently, "you *can* cook. These mushrooms are delicious."

"And the coffee?" asked Wasteneys.

"I never tasted such coffee."

"Are you happy?" asked Wasteneys, presently.

"Very. And you?"

"Very."

Of course, they said many other things to each other, like any ordinary human beings. They talked of trout-fishing, and birds and beasts and butterflies—of which Wasteneys had a very intimate knowledge, which greatly interested Meriel.

Meanwhile, the morning was rapidly growing into the forenoon, and suddenly Meriel rose. "I must go now."

So near had they come in this short time, as by the renewal of an old intercourse—rather than by the quick ripening of a new acquaintance—that there seemed something absurd in their parting at all. They took each other's hands very simply, and looked into each other's eyes, a sudden gravity coming over them—and it seemed nothing new or strange for Wasteneys to be saying very quietly: "I love you."

"I know," answered Meriel, "and I love you. But we shall never be happier than we have been this morning. You must not love me like that.

Love me as you would love a tree or a wild bird or a star; but not as a woman. I can never make you happy. Now, kiss me."

Wasteneys took her in his arms. Yet, when she had gone, he said to himself that it was a strange kiss; there seemed so little of "the human trouble" in it. So one might be kissed by a dear sister, or be taken into the cool heart of a flower.

"We shall meet again," Meriel had said as she went away, "but we must not fix a time. If we are to meet, we shall meet. How dare we fix a day and an hour for the soul!"

But Wasteneys had something commonplace and earthly in his composition that set his heart aching at this speech. He felt that it was wonderful in Meriel to feel like that, but, all the same, he would have preferred a simple definite appointment, after the manner of this world.

After all, Meriel was more human than her words—for when Wasteneys took his walk next morning, quite hopeless of such a miracle happening twice, there she was again.

"I had to come," she said; and she put up her

face to be kissed, as though she had been his child.

For several successive mornings they met in this way, and then she suddenly vanished, like the moon when it has completed its quarters. As Wasteneys entered the meadow that morning, his heart sank with a premonition that she would not be there, and, coming to his hut, he found a letter pinned to the door. She had been there before him.

She could come thus and slip away again, and bear not to see him! There he vaguely felt was a difference in their loves. The letter was brief, but filled with an unearthly intensity and fairy-like exquisiteness of feeling. So a star—unconscious of its starriness—might write to a moth that loved it.

CHAPTER XV.

A VIGIL.

WASTENEYS' meeting with Meriel made conscious for the first time a latent expectancy in his attitude to life. He had deemed himself content, happily busied with his art or the various occupations of a young man socially fortunate. But now he realised that, unconsciously, he had been all the time waiting for something to happen—something, one might say, miraculous, which would suddenly fill life with an almost supernatural sense of perfect joy. We must all of us be familiar with those dreams in which we imagine that our heart's desire—hopelessly unrealisable in the daylight of fact—has suddenly been granted to us. Perhaps we dream that someone long since dead and lost to us has never been dead at all. They come to us with shining faces, and the

old aching heart is suddenly replaced by a thrilling security. Our hopes were not foolish after all. Here they are—safe, safe. We shall never lose them again. The fairy tale of life has come true.

So with Wasteneys. In meeting Meriel he realised for the first time that life is meant to flower in an ideal transfiguration; that, unconsciously, we all dream of, and wait for, that flowering; and that, as with some trees in the natural world, the life-tree of some may never flower at all, or suddenly as by miracle once in a hundred years.

There are two revelations—perhaps one at heart—which perfect life by throwing across it this ideal glory: the revelation of Religion, and the revelation of Love; and the half-conscious longing which even simple, common, natures know for this breaking into flower of the staid leafage of their lives we call the desire of "romance." Romance! That is the lead of daily life suddenly turning to gold, in the fire of an unfamiliar emotion, a strange experience, a face like morning in heaven.

Love makes us radiantly certain of two things: certain that life really meant us to be happy, after

all; and certain of the soul's immortality. Love has but one fear: that love may end suddenly as it began, that the magic light may suddenly fade, and leave the world grey once more, as it was before the magic light streamed across it.

To have met Meriel was for Wasteneys the same as if some religious soul tossed in doubt should suddenly be blest with a blinding vision of the Holy Mother; blinding, yet bringing with it a calm indubitable assurance of heavenly realities.

And it seemed too that Meriel's meeting with Wasteneys had meant for her a like exaltation of the spirit. Her letter revealed her in hushed adoration before the mystery which had thus suddenly been shown to them. "Let me be still and live and wonder," she wrote, concluding, as with face raised in prayer, a letter of strange superhuman ecstasy. But Wasteneys sought in vain for the human cry, the simple earthly longing for the nearness of the beloved, which his own less transcendental nature craved. It seemed as if she loved not him but the Love which meeting him had revealed to her. He was a priest who had revealed to her a great and lovely mystery;

and she called on him to worship it with her. Alas! the priest's eyes were on the mortal woman. It was not Love he loved, it was Meriel. But Meriel's gaze was on the star that had been born of their living eyes—as a mother, in loving her child, will sometimes forget the husband through whom it came into being.

Wasteneys loved her after the manner of men and women who dream of a fair home together, and little children born of their love. His dream was divine, but it was domestic too: a Holy Family, with Meriel as the Madonna. But very soon he realised that this dream could never be fulfilled. It was as though one should ask some airy being of the element to come and keep house with us under a roof, some sylph, whose only home is among the star-beams and the ranging winds.

It was the gradual, but certain, realisation of this as time went on that had filled Wasteneys with all that unworthy disintegrating sorrow. Alas! this love, so unearthly in its spiritual exaltation, was to prove a love of peculiar hopelessness. Superhuman in its joy —alas! it was to prove superhuman in its conditions too. It may be said that if Wasteneys had been

made of finer clay, he would have been content with this transcendental union, and entered into Meriel's dream of a love that was as content to be far as to be near in a world where space and time did not exist, divinely indifferent to human satisfactions. But this would be to ask, not so much a refinement of mortal clay, as human material not human at all. One might as well ask a man to breathe without air, or to breathe in water, like a fish, or, like a salamander, in the fire. It was no more a duty of Wasteney's nature to adapt itself to Meriel's conditions of loving than it was a duty of hers to adapt itself to his. They loved differently, and the difference made an airy barrier between them which neither could permanently pass. For brief hours Meriel could become tenderly and gaily human—a simple woman, a home-woman, a mother of little human babes—and for brief hours Wasteneys could reach up into her ideal element, and forget that he was a man, a human husband and father. In such hours each dreamed delusively that at last their own dream of union was to be made perfect. But too soon came the understanding that they had not meant alike, after all. Wasteneys

had all the time been hoping that perhaps the moment had now come when the sylph-woman would become all woman, and make her home in his arms for ever—a simple human wife.

In the three years which had gone by since their first meeting he had met Meriel only five times. Suddenly, after months of waiting, the silence would flower in a letter—tender and longing as if it were the love-letter of a veritable human woman. It almost seemed as if Meriel was like one of those fabled beings who are human only for certain brief hours each year. Unconsciously, Wasteneys was waiting for these letters all the year. Meanwhile, he filled in the time, as those who wait are apt to do—trivially, sometimes unworthily.

Here it was that Meriel harmed him, though she knew nothing of what she did. It never occurred to her that it was cruel to leave him thus month after month without a word. She herself felt no need of letters from him, no need to see his face; and yet she loved him all the time, in her strange way. To her he was always present. Only, it seemed, once a year did the longing come over her to see him face

to face, to look into his eyes and touch his hand. So much human nourishment her starry passion needed —so much, but alas! no more.

And those five meetings had told him little more of the human Meriel than he had known at the beginning. She had told him nothing of herself, nor had she cared to ask anything about him. Such particulars were irrelevant for two who met, so to say, merely as essential personalities, divested of incidental associations and conditions. They might as well discuss housekeeping or dressmaking. Wasteneys' value for Meriel was an ideal value. To his mere human history she was indifferent, and he was well content for the brief hour that she lived in his eyes to "be still and live and wonder."

To the average human being in love those meetings would have seemed strangely unlike the meetings of lovers. They were made up of childish surface gaiety, as of happy children on a picnic, and—silence. Meriel had an almost terrible love of silence. She seemed to fear words as she feared every other human device of expression. "Words are nearly always wrong," she said, "and when they are right they are

unnecessary." And as she and Wasteneys would sit with their hands clasped across their country luncheon table—for sometimes they had met at an old inn they had fancied, and sometimes in the fields—it was true indeed that silence said all. Sometimes Meriel would break it with a deep sigh of happiness, just to say:

"So you are really alive. I have seen you once more. Now I can be alone again."

It was idle to wonder why she should thus be content with looking once a year into the face that might be all day and every day within her sight. When Wasteneys sometimes whispered that, the untamed look would come into her eyes, the look of the bird that feared the cage. She would look at him half defiantly and half piteously, as though begging him not to rob her of her wild wings.

When Wasteneys came to the end of the little packet of letters, he turned to the book in which we have before seen him writing. To-night he was insatiable for memories. And even his own records of past moments of feeling had a value for him almost as if they had been written by Meriel herself,

impregnated as they were with that immediacy of impression which words, simple enough, written in an emotional present are sometimes able to retain far into the future, when perhaps the opportunities of such emotion can occur no more. Such is the value of a journal, such is the value of all concrete expression. A journal of old feeling is like a telescope through which we see the past history of the heart, not as a mere hazy cloud of distant glory, but separate star by star, moment by moment. The old agonies, the old ecstasies, may thus be repeated for us, as by some diabolical marvel of physical science. Wasteneys, fanatically eager to protect his passion against the slightest dulling of time, had written in this book from day to day the history of his heart. Sometimes it was a poem, sometimes it was an extract from one of Meriel's letters, sometimes it was a letter of his own in which it had seemed to him that he had used words at a fortunate moment—under the inspiring influence of some literary planet! There were many moods and moments recorded—moods even of rebellion against this tyranny of the ideal—though these were few,

and chiefly one must notice the almost pathetic patience with which Wasteneys tried to understand and adapt himself to an ideal of love which was not his own, but the imperious fantastic dream of a beautiful non-human being in the delusive shape of a human woman. The whole of *The Sad Heart of Pagan Wasteneys* can never be published, but the next chapter consists of a few of its most important pages.

CHAPTER XVI.

"THE SAD HEART OF PAGAN WASTENEYS."

I AM trying, God knows, to understand this strange and bitter love—this Love whose two words are Absence and Silence. To-day in a mood, I am afraid, of some bitterness, I wrote these lines, trying rather after the expression of what it would seem Meriel wishes me to feel, than what I really feel myself—the tentative expression of an abstract love, of which both Meriel and I are the accidental instruments. One may come to love the violin for the music it stores within it, but such love is mere association, and our real love is for the music. So is it that Meriel loves me. She loves Love—not me. Ah, if only I could love Meriel in the same way!

"To love!
That is my prayer.
Gifted to love,
Just the old simple everlasting way;
Of all life's gifts
That is the gift I crave.

"I ask not kindness,
I ask not any gift or any grace,
Or any charity;
The love I mean
Is not for you to give or take away.

"That you are cruel
Shall be no less provocative
Than that you're kind,
And whether you remember or forget
Shall to the love I crave
Be equal lure.

"I ask not nearness,
You are ever near;
I ask not sympathy
In common aims,
I ask not comprehension,
I ask not anything.

"Only I pray to love,
And bring my heart
Gladly for you to break,
If break it can,
Gladly to feel your fair contemptuous feet
Grind it beneath you
In the passionate dust.
Yea, break my heart,
For that were ecstasy!

"Think not 'tis you I crave,
You to possess, command, nay! nor to serve;
My love would not be kind,
Nor live in offices of tenderness;
You to the thing I crave
Are but the accident from which it springs.

"It is not admiration,
It is not gratitude,
It is only love,—
A madness,
A glory burning in the lonely brain,
A fearful fire filling the lonely heart.

"To love, to love, to love!
Is this the way?"

* * * * * *

To-day I said to myself: If you love her, how can you follow unworthy pleasures which, before you taste them, you know to be dust and ashes. Ah! ask one who writhes in torment why he seeks the anodyne that gives him at least a little ease—though alas! it is but renewing his capacity for further pain.

And, dwelling on this thought, I wrote this sonnet, imagining an accuser—who is none other than my own heart; for only to my own heart is Meriel known.

"I heard a liar say my love doth cease,
Heart of my heart, because sometimes I rest
My burning head upon some other breast,
Seeking in all this hell a little peace;
A little comfort in this long disease
Of loss I suffer, loss by them unguessed
Who find in the new-born East for long-lost West
Sufficient heaven. I am not of these.

"But, sometimes, when the life I may not kill
Grinds pitiless iron on the screaming nerve,
I cry for woman as ether, woman as wine,
Lest Death's black poppies in my hair I twine:
Thus, faithful-faithless, work I on until
Finished the bidding of the saint I serve."

* * * * * *

In a like mood of self-accusation I wrote this fable also:

"'What a wonderful influence you have on the sea!' said a star to the moon.

"'That depends upon what you call an influence,' replied the moon.

"'It is true that the sea worships me, and follows me whither I will, like a great shaggy dog—but, so far as I can see, his love of me has done nothing to soften his cruel heart, he is as wild a liver now as when we first met, and his bosom, as of old, is full of monsters.'"

Men talk of the influence of women. But do women really influence us at all?

* * * * * *

It was Meriel's birthday to-day. I could not resist

breaking the silence with some flowers. With them I sent these lines, which I copy out only because they are true:

> " True heart,
> True heart,
> I have no joy but thee.
> Sugared delights maybe,
> And coloured toys,
> But my enduring joys
> Must come from thee;
> Always and always, love,
> Must come from thee."

* * * * * *

Meriel wrote to-day:

"Do you believe in an immortal love which ceases but to grow in sleep more perfect? Can you endure the silence of who knows how many centuries to come—and yet still love me at the end?"

I answered: "Very little child, I shall love you as long as this strange life lasts—longer, I cannot say, as I am too old and too real to make promises for an eternity of which I know nothing."

* * * * * *

I have had a strange feeling this week that Meriel was in London, though I have no word from her;

and the feeling has been so strong that I have walked the streets looking for her—in vain. As I walked I made this little song:

> " I sought through London for one face,
> London with all her lovely faces,
> At every hour in every place
> I sought my one beloved face,
> Yea! sought it in unlovely places.
>
> " But, though I waited all day long,
> She never never never came,
> In vain I drown my heart in song,
> In vain each day I call her name—
> God give me courage to be strong,
> And love her still the same."

* * * * * *

[Letter from Wasteneys to Meriel, written while at a little fishing village in Brittany.]

" Impossible dear fairy—whom I have just raised my eyes from this paper to look at and say: 'Is it possible that that wonderful being there loves me?'

" I have just sat through a wonderful sunsetting down there in the old fishing harbour, my back against the sea, at the far end of a rude pier of tumbled stones, fenced in by a strong basket-work of beams and piles—and my face to the sky, made

curiously heart-breaking with rigging and old men's faces. The sky was a smoky orange, and the sea a strange immaterial silver, very pale and volatile—everything unreal, and yet everything so real one could hardly bear it. I watched the patient fishermen hauling in their heavy boats over the sandy bar, at the narrow mouth of the little corral, where they all come scudding in to stable at evening, and the manly little sailor lads rowing out briskly in the phantasmal light just for a frolic, and the ancient man who came to light the funny old lantern at the end of the pier. . . . O, and a hundred human touches and a hundred lights and changes on the face of the beautiful sad, sad world; and all the time I wanted you to be with me, for it is only you and I together who can understand anything like that. We shouldn't have spoken a word, but we should have loved it just in the same way, with childish eyes—and, having stayed till we were quite sure we had caught cold, we would have turned next to the hotel in search of cognac or hot whisky!

"O, little child, little child, I care for nothing at all sad or glad in life, except to know that you

really love me. Nothing could seem so happy and successful for me as just to come and lay my head on your shoulder, the whole world else, with its arts, and its ambitions, forgotten. I have felt this first for you of all human beings, and I shall never feel it for anyone else. You are my one necessity. Without you I can seem to be happy, and seem to succeed in a hundred ways, for in the world are many brave and loving hearts, and many beautiful things to do; but without you, my innermost heart will be dusty with failure.

"My very soul grows sick to think that you may, just this very tick of the clock, have ceased to love me!

"O, my little child—don't let us lose each other! Don't take fancies and think you don't love me, or I you. Be fantastic in all else, but not in our love. In this just be prosaic and common-sensible, as you know so well, thank goodness, how to be. Yes, I think it is the prose I want most to live with you, with the humorous childish touches that are ours.

"Child, do you remember all the times we have been together, the way we looked at each other,

the sound of our voices? I went to our little inn the other day, and had lunch laid for us in our little room, and a bottle of our own wine waiting for you . . . But you never came. So I set a rose in your place!

"Another day, I went to the Wood of Silence—do you remember?—where I grew angry with your knotted dumbness, and walked away from you up and down on the common, till you came up to me, like a child, with eyes just hinting tears, as the sky at twilight hints stars—and said you had been 'naughty.' Little angel-face. God help me!

"Meriel—will you never love me with a simple wish to have me by you—as I love you!

"O, forgive me for breaking the silence. To-night I felt I must speak—must call to you. Do you hear me, away up there in the stars where you live—Greatest of all things Great?"

* * * * * *

Is it not strange and terrible to think that as I was writing that letter to Meriel she was at the same moment writing this to me?

[Part of a letter from Meriel, crossing letter from Wasteneys just quoted.]

"O, say once more that you are mine—that I am yours. And then I think that Heaven's gates will open and pour forth wonderful music—which I shall hear for ever, until I die. You were mine since the beginning of the world. How *can* we part? My little child—all things pass; but the great truths remain, and we live in their shadow or their light. Our love is a great truth, I think—a truth so sure that I feel that I need never see you, never possess you, yet see you always and possess you always.

"Last night I walked along the road with you, and, as we talked, the stars and the warm winds caressed us—and the water lapped the shore at our feet, so lazily. . . . We can always be together now, dear child. My heart leaps to think of the frolics we can have, here in this silent land, so full of voices.

"There are moments when I think that I shall really become Silence indeed—a living, gleaming

Silence! I am growing so used to sitting alone with my soul—talking to it in the language of Silence. I often feel that there is nothing in the world so beautiful as this silence. I'm so glad you understand that side of me—for it is such a large side! The side that speaks grows more and more afraid to speak—more and more fond of its silent sister whom it fears to disturb."

* * * * * *

Sitting watching the sea to-night, I made this song for Meriel.

"O love, I look across the sea,
The sails go by,
From vastness into vastness fade,
Lost in the sky.

"O the great world! so wide and cold,
And you so far!
If only you could come as near
As yonder star.

"Aloft, alone, I vex it not
With me or mine,
So far—yet am I near enough
To see it shine."

* * * * * *

Here is another song I made for her.

> " Long after you are dead
> I will kiss the shoes of your feet,
> And the long bright hair of your head
> Will go on being sweet ;
> In each little thing you wore
> We shall go on meeting, love ;
> In a ring we shall meet,
> In a fan we shall meet,
> Or a long-forgotten glove.
> Long after you are dead,
> O, the bright hair of your head,
> And the shoes of your little feet ! "

CHAPTER XVII.

IN WHICH WASTENEYS SEES MERIEL ONCE MORE.

THE candles had burnt low and their light was paling before the dawn as Wasteneys finished reading. He threw himself into bed exhausted with his debauch of memory, and was soon in a sound sleep, and in his sleep he dreamed a dream of simple happiness. Meriel had been changed into a little human woman who loved him, and came with wifely eyes to give her life into his hands. He woke with an intense security of peace enfolding him like a blissful music. And his sleep, instead of banishing a wild wish that had been born of his reading in the book of the past, rather reinforced it with morning vigour. As he had read, he had felt that, whatever it cost, he must see Meriel once more. He would not violate her seclusion. She should not see him. All he craved was to see her—to

watch her from a distance, as she took her walks by the sea—to hold his breath as she passed by, so close perhaps that he could almost touch her dress with his hand—to watch her goings in and out, as he might watch the Host being carried in some solemn procession wherein he took no part.

It was now some six months since he had received a letter from her, and it was hardly likely that she was still staying at the little fishing village from which she had last written—a remote, rarely-visited cluster of houses among the cliffs of the Devonshire coast—chosen, so she had said, for its wonderful Silence. The Sea and the Silence. However, he could at least try. And, in his present mood, merely to travel in the hope of seeing her would be a relief to the tension of his spirit. Merely to look out the trains made his heart beat with hope. Who knows but his dream might come true, and he should find her waiting for him—his wife at last?

At all events, he should see her again—see her again—see her again! O God, just to *see* her again!

It was inadvisable for his plan that he should go

to the same village, for thus he could hardly hope to avoid Meriel's discovery of him; but, as it happened, knowing the coast-line well, he chose a still more obscure fishing inlet three miles north. For a mile or so the coast near Meriel's village was fringed with a thin woodland, on which he relied for cover. He smiled boyishly as he thought of the desperate scouting tactics to which he must have recourse—in pursuit of a moonbeam. He was to track, and spy upon, his love, as though she were his enemy. His enemy! What if she were really that?

Besides, still more fortunately for his plan, Meriel's village was all clustered together at the outlet of a deep, wooded cleft, by which a little river made its way to the sea. For some three miles inland a path ran by the river's side right up into the hills. Meriel might choose this landward walk, or the walk along the coast by the sea. Whichever she chose, Wasteneys would be able to see even her very starting out. The little house, next door to the Post Office, and within a few yards of the Beach Hotel, was well known to him. By some freak of former occupation it was called "Les Rossignols,"

and was marked by the possession of a small balcony from its two upper windows. Wasteneys had only to place himself sufficiently early high up on the adjacent hill which commanded the whole village, to see the first faint smoke that rose from its morning chimney. No one could go in or out of its rose-clustered doorway without his seeing them.

But Wasteneys' train—and twenty miles of coach—brought him so early to his destination on a certain moonlit evening of May, that he could not wait for morning. After a brief impatient meal, he walked the three miles of moon-mysterious, sea-murmuring coast, and found himself in a thick hush of trees looking down into a gulf of moon-white and shadow-black village.

The little boisterous river glittered quartz-like, half in shadow, half in the moon—making a childish treble against the recurrent bass of the sea. Ruddy windows and occasional naked lamp-flames warmed the shadows here and there. From the billiard-room of the Beach Hotel came a bar-parlour radiance. The night was so still that he could hear the click

of the billiard balls, and through the undrawn blinds Wasteneys noted mechanically the marker flatteringly scoring breaks of three and four.

He had already noted that the balcony windows of "Les Rossignols" shone with a muffled radiance. At least the rooms were not empty. Was it Meriel behind those blinds, like a precious jewel swathed in coverings and yet shining through them?

It *must* be Meriel. All else had answered so eloquently to the stress of his mood—the wonderful night, the little singing river, the deep-sighing, sympathetic darkness of the trees, like the backwoods of his soul, his own high heart happy and resolute. Why! he half believed that if Meriel were not there, his masterful wonder-working love would have power to bring her there. "If ye have faith" —the old words came back to him—"ye shall move mountains"! His love seemed mighty enough at that moment to take the sea in its hand and bring it to Meriel for a garment, and to reach up into the sky and snatch the moon for a pearl to clasp it with.

Meriel must be there! God denies us the com-

plete dial, but he is usually generous with moments. Wasteneys was sure of this moment, and his assurance was right. Presently the muffled light parted like a leafy envelope and let slip a flower of clear light. When it had closed again two figures were seated on the balcony. Wasteneys noted that they were both women—noted it with an unpremeditated gratitude. It only occurred to him now for the first time that the other figure might have been a man—for, of course, he knew with the first beat of his heart that followed his first sight of that loved presence—that it was Meriel. You who have known the bliss of seeing a loved woman once more, after many months, can imagine for me the bliss that possessed Wasteneys as he looked on his distant, moon-shadowy Meriel again. Presently Meriel took something into her arms. Soon Wasteneys realised that it was a violin—and he realised, too, at the same moment, how pathetically little he knew of the daily occupations of her life, her ways and her tastes. In fact, he knew as little of her as he knew of yonder star. All he really knew was that it was good to see her shine—but

of the inner life of that radiant planet, set in the sky like a white rose, he knew nothing.

Meriel began to play very softly, almost timorously; tentative breathings, half-suppressed sighs of longing, little sudden frightened calls that ran back again, as it were, into the strings as soon as uttered; and then suddenly, as though determined to dare to the height and depth of her desire, wood and strings strained together in a great flooding call that seemed to fill the sky with tall summoning angels of passion, with flocks of little birds warbling desire, and silver butterflies of flitting hope.

No one who knew anything of the mystical cabala of music could doubt that here was a soul calling across the sea to another soul. Here was a soul-call —clear and full as a bird-call. Across the hundreds of miles this soul was calling to its other soul, as sure of being heard as when thrush calls to thrush in the dawn, or the nightjar churrs heart-brokenly to its fern-hidden mate in the thickening woods.

Wasteneys' heart beat with volcanic world-creating joy. Could it be that she was calling him? Surely, *surely*, she was calling—and surely it was

him she was calling. O to be a morning star, that he might break out into sudden answer of singing from his covert in the dark wood, or to have brought with him twelve nightingales in a cage—shrouded all day in a black velvet hood, but released to singing on the sudden sight of the moon. O, for an answer to that call—no verbal, mortal cry, no intermediate symbolic articulation in some provincial human tongue, but some essential cry of the very soul and body of things. Properly, there is only one verb for love. It is not "*amo.*" It is not "*aimer.*" It is not the softest Italian verb. No printed language of man knows it. But the violin knows it, and the wild bird knows it, even the sea knows it. The rose *is* it, and the moon *is* it. And the look of a man's eyes into a woman's *is* it, and the look of a woman's eyes back again *is* it. But no man or woman can *say* it, in any language that endures.

Only a violin, and a nightingale, and a woman talking in her sleep, can be trusted to say it—as alone it can worthily be said.

Poor Wasteneys felt humiliatingly conscious of

his own narrowness of expression as Meriel's violin called across the sea.

Alas! for the stiff square words that stuck in his throat and refused to melt into any universal music. Poems he could write, of course—he wrote one as he walked back to his lodging through the sea-talking woods—but what is a poem against a violin? Meriel had called him, and he had nothing better to answer her with than a poem. Even a pistol-shot—a little shining revolver (there was a thought!)—had been better than that. There had been a real essential *sound*, a sound that needed no translation, a verb of a universal language. But a poem! Yet, as the only poor utterance he had, he copied out the poem on his return to his inn

The gods express themselves in flaming minerals, that after millions of years cool to continents of equatorial green; man drills his thought in marble; wòman cries herself into a child; the soldier wastes himself in fire; but the poet delicately walks in a garden of words—he takes here a petal and there a petal, expressing himself in soft garlands of unperilous flowers.

However, as Wasteneys thought it worth while to copy it out, I, too, will reproduce here the poem referred to. Remember, in his favour, that it was really but a form of enforced silence. He longed for more immediate utterance of the love that was in him, but that the very reverence of his love denied him.

Here is the little poem:

> "Canst thou be true across so many miles,
> So many days that keep us still apart?
> Ah, canst thou live upon remembered smiles,
> And ask no warmer comfort for thy heart?
>
> "I call thy name right up into the sky,
> Dear name, O surely she shall hear and hark!
> Nay, though I toss it singing up so high,
> It drops again, like yon returning lark.
>
> "O be a dove, dear name, and find her breast,
> There croon and nestle all the lonely day;
> Go tell her that I love her still the best,
> So many days, so many miles, away."

After all, he was not the first man who has found himself unequal to answering a violin played by a beautiful woman.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MERIEL EXPLAINS HERSELF.

WASTENEYS was early at his green watch-tower next day, and Meriel, still apparently an early riser, was not long after him in taking the morning air. She came out carrying her violin-case, and with a letter in her hand. This she posted, and then, crossing the little bridge that spanned the stream, took the path which led along the beach. From his woodland Wasteneys would be able to keep her in sight all the time. Through his glass he could bring her face so near that it seemed almost to touch his, and he could look so closely into her eyes that he felt she must feel his eyes upon her.

How wonderful it was to see her again! Only just to be allowed to look at her like this day after day! He felt that that would more than content

his aching heart. In fact, it seemed to him that his love craved nothing more, that indeed there was nothing more to crave. Was she not right, perhaps, after all, in her aloofness from human ties? Such beauty was not to wive. Would it not naturally fulfil itself in some diviner way? One might as well dream that the Monna Lisa should descend from her immortal canvas, to be the mother of mortal babes.

Yes! if only he might look at Meriel, every day and all day long. His passion was so far sublimated as to have become a passion of mere sight. If only the human masterpiece would consent to the eternal gaze of the worshipping eyes!

The comparison gave Wasteneys a little shiver of fear. He had read in old books of men who had loved statues, hoping, maybe, that one day in a spring rain of warm kisses they would turn to very woman—heaving, sighing, clinging, violet-breathing woman. These men, he recalled, had always gone mad, and sometimes had broken the beloved image into a hundred white fragments. Was he the victim of such a dream? Perhaps he

was. He did not care. There was Meriel picking her way along the shore—he could see her, *see* her. His heart might still be aching, but his eyes were in heaven.

He followed her stealthily through the trees. At last she came to a secluded rocky place, and, sitting down, took her nightingale from its cage. Soon it was singing once more across the sea. Again it was the voice of longing. No one could hear and doubt that it was calling someone—as a siren might sing to distant ships. Meriel was calling him! Very softly he stole down the cliffs from his hiding-place—forgotten all his resolutions, and, as the last long cry of the violin died away, he was within a dozen yards of the woman he loved.

"Meriel," he said, very softly.

She turned with a slight start.

"How strange!" she said; "and yet I knew you would come."

"You were calling me?"

"Did you not hear?"

"Did you call me two nights ago?"

"Yes."

"I heard you"—and Wasteneys realised that his passion of memory had been but an answer to her distant call.

"How wonderful—how terrible—life is, when I can call and you can hear like this," said Meriel.

"I grew suddenly afraid of the Silence," she continued, "and longed to hold your hand while I listened to it."

"Still—the Silence!" said Wasteneys.

"I love it more and more. Some day I think I shall grow all Silence, like those who are turned to stone in fairy-tales. Words are only attempts to say over again what nature has said already. Why talk of the sea when you have the sea itself? So soon as we really feel . . . but there are already two good essays on Silence," she ended with a laugh, "and I know you have read them both."

"Let us build a temple to Silence," said Wasteneys. "I could dream," he added presently, "of a Trappist monastery of two, who should love each other for ever in silence—gazing into each other's eyes."

"Ah!" laughed Meriel. "But you would break

your vows the first day. You would be compelled to say, 'I love you.' You could not love without words. Then, too, you would be unable to resist your fancy and your wit. I love them both," she added, as if fearing to hurt him, "but you will admit that they are not Silence."

"Might not two silences sometimes crave the offspring of words?" asked Wasteneys; "even the Trappists are allowed speech once a year."

"Yes! but I'm sure the true Trappist would have only one thing to say: 'How good is the Silence!'"

"I heard your violin calling to me last night," said Wasteneys. "Was that Silence?"

"Yes! it was the deepest Silence," said Meriel, laughing. "It was only Silence made audible, as certain seers are able to see the forms that move invisible to us in the air. Human speech is very different. It is provincial sound—whereas the speech of the violin is universal sound."

"Would you expect a cow, then, to understand it?" asked Wasteneys.

"Ah! it is there you fail!—you must laugh, you must talk—even in heaven!"

"I don't think I should," said Wasteneys wistfully, "if I were sure it was heaven—or rather if I was sure it was a heaven meant for me."

"Poor human child!" said Meriel. "You have been suffering. I can see how lonely you have been."

Wasteneys was as humbly glad as a dog for a caress.

"But," said Meriel, after a while, "I cannot help it!"

"I know," answered Wasteneys; "I love you."

He meant: "Crucify me as you will. I am yours till the end of the world."

"You think me strange, and even cruel, I know," said Meriel, presently.

"I love you," Wasteneys answered.

"But you must try and understand," Meriel continued, "that you are no less strange to me. Perhaps you think me 'inhuman'—so to say. But then I might retort that you are 'human'—you have many strange little warm needs that I can't understand. And yet you are capable of the great simple satisfactions if you would only try."

"Now, at least, I am content," said Wasteneys.

"Why?"

"Because I am near you."

"Ah, yes! but you should be as happy when we are far away."

"But why be so afraid of nearness?"

"Because nearness awakens the Little Needs. In a sense it makes us further away. It obscures the great meaning by trivial expression."

"Why am I here?"

"Because I love you."

"Even you sometimes crave nearness too."

"Yes!" said Meriel, half laughing. "I am so far human—but it is weakness all the same."

"Then you think that the greatest lovers would always be invisible to each other."

"Yes—physically invisible. Spiritually they are always near. I never love you so much when you are near to me as when you are far away—and yet sometimes I feel that I must hold your hands and look into your eyes."

"Even kiss me?"

"Yes! even that," said Meriel, and she kissed him.

"You are human, after all," said Wasteneys.

"Once a year," said Meriel, laughing.

"I should have expected you to understand," said Meriel, presently.

"Through my mind I do," said Wasteneys, "but such understanding amounts to little more than a recognition that your nature is subject to different laws than mine. I can understand that it is natural for a bird to fly—but alas! I cannot fly."

"Not with me?"

"Will you not walk with me instead?"

"Alas! I cannot!"

"Alas! I cannot fly—except perhaps once a year. I am flying now."

"I am walking," said Meriel.

"Forget your wings, and stay with me on the earth—till my wings grow; and then we can fly away together right up among the stars, and never come down to earth any more."

"If I stayed so long on the earth, I should forget how to fly. Your wings would have grown, perhaps, but mine would have withered."

"No," mused Meriel presently, after a silence, "we love differently. We shall never love the same."

"Can such love continue?" asked Wasteneys.

"No—yours will die. It is already dying—though you do not yet know it," said Meriel, looking very gravely into his eyes. "But mine will last for ever. Yours will die, because I cannot give it the human food it craves. Mine will live because it asks nothing but the idea of you . . . the dream of you that exists in my mind. If I were to live with you day after day that dream would be dimmed. Little daily cares, little human blemishes—in themselves unimportant—would obscure it. I should be unable to see you as you really are, from very nearness. I should see you, as it were, through a microscope. I would rather see you far off, like a star. Then you would grow old," and Meriel shuddered.

"But I should love you for those very blemishes as well," said Wasteneys; "they would be dear to me, not only because they were yours, but because of their very humanity. And how sweet to grow old together!"

"I cannot understand," said Meriel. "It seems to me that there is a moment when the soul's beauty and the body's beauty are one. That moment is youth. All fresh and unused, the body is then as beautiful as the soul, but soon, alas! the body, being made of perishable stuff, begins to wear, and less and less resembles the soul within. The soul is growing more beautiful, perhaps, every day, but the body is dying. In vain it strives to answer to the soul within. I know you will say that some old faces are beautiful. They are, but it is a negative beauty, like the beauty of what we call skeleton leaves—the beauty of a clean decay. It does not really represent the soul within, for the soul is always growing younger; and wrinkled cheeks, however beautiful the wrinkles, are age. They speak of no future, whereas the soul is all future. No, the beauty of age is only a kind word. . . ."

"You make me wish that your face was wrinkled, Meriel."

"You shall never see it then," answered Meriel.

"Human nature, so to say, *is* wrinkles," said Wasteneys—"and the love of wrinkles."

"How sad to be human!" said Meriel.

"It is," said Wasteneys, perhaps with an unconscious bitterness.

As Meriel talked, Wasteneys became conscious of an unwonted operation of his mind which filled him with dim alarm. At last his mind said it out clear: He was criticising her.

If it had only been Meriel's mind that he had to encounter—these rather youthful transcendental opinions—he might securely have counted upon victory. For so had he not talked ten years ago, a dreaming boy? But, alas! these were not merely Meriel's opinions—it was her nature. With him the reverse had been the case. He was for the first time in his life consciously face to face with a different nature, and he recognised more poignantly than ever the hopelessness of the dream that possessed him, at once the hopelessness and the unreason of it. For was he not asking Meriel to be different from what she was—like a common human husband? She was the moon in the sky—he commanded her to step down and be a flower in his little walled garden. And the image admonished

him that all these last three years had been but a childish crying for the moon.

She was not a human thing; she never would be. Wives were different. If you wanted little human babes, and a home sweet as wall-flower, you must not love the moon.

And yet she looked so human, such a woman, was so tender and simple at whiles. What was she, after all, but a child? She would change. And, O God, how beautiful she was—and how clear was the flame of his worship of that beauty; how small a part in it had that "Little Love" which Meriel despised. If only he might look at her—have her growing, like some "angel-watered lily," in his sight day after day. Sight was enough possession.

As they thus sat together talking and musing, Meriel took her violin and sent gay little butterflies of sound flitting along the shore. She at least was happy. When she had tired of the violin, she turned to Wasteneys very gently:

"Dear, you must go now. My mother will be waiting for me."

"That lady I saw on the balcony last night was your mother?"

"Yes! I have to be very good to her—she is blind."

"Blind!"—and in the exclamation Wasteneys put his sympathy and his recognition of the paradox which made Meriel human at this one point.

"Yes! be kind—to her," he added.

"She needs me so," said Meriel. There were some human needs that even Meriel regarded. To his need of her she gave no thought.

"To-morrow?" said Wasteneys, as she rose and placed her violin in its case.

"No," said Meriel. "I cannot. We have seen each other. To-morrow would be merely repetition."

Wasteneys heart ached, and a certain dim sense of rebellion stirred within him.

"What if I should disobey?" he said.

"I should hate you," she answered very quietly.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MAN FROM FAIRYLAND.

WASTENEYS returning to London was the Man from Fairyland. In spite of all the complexity of his feelings, the sum of him was one happy thought. He had seen Meriel once more. His face shone with it—it almost seemed to him that his joy must cling to him like a discovering perfume, that passers-by must point him out in the street. London seemed strange and unreal, and all the roar of its traffic went by like a sound heard in a dream. As he walked along the streets, a door kept softly opening in the traffic, and there was that calm little haven, bathed in all blessing and all peace.

The morning after his return, towards noon, he was walking along Piccadilly, which was fresh and gay as only London can look in the May sunshine. He noticed little and smiled to himself as he went

along. Presently his attention was caught by a lady in a hansom who was waving her parasol to him. She was a very pretty lady, and looked all the prettier in her fresh spring gown.

"Why!" said Wasteneys with an inner laugh, "it's Mrs. Mendoza!"

He gave her his best smile as he bowed, and was for passing on, but she stopped the hansom, and leaning out, said:

"Won't you drive with me a little way? It is years since we met—you faithless boy."

Really she was very pretty, and Wasteneys had been half consciously feeling the need of some not too serious companion to whom he could talk and talk—and yet tell them nothing.

"You are looking very happy," she said, as he seated himself beside her.

"I am."

"Do you think it quite polite to be so happy when we haven't met all this time?"

"Surely there is all the more reason for me to look happy now that we have met."

"But that cruel telegram, and not one word since."

Wasteneys pleaded mysterious family troubles.

"And you really have been faithful to me, in spite of appearances?"

"Do you doubt me?"

Daffodil was considerately unexacting in her demand for proofs. She lazily took Wasteneys' word; but, of course, it was only seemly to have these little affectations of seriousness.

"We shall still make life wonderful for each other," said Wasteneys slyly.

"Can you not make it wonderful for me to-day?"

"How?"

"Take me to lunch."

"May I? You are free?"

In the slight stress Wasteneys laid on the word "free" Daffodil detected a tentative reference to Mr. Mendoza; so she laughed.

"Why do you laugh?"

"O, nothing."

"Tell me."

"Do you remember asking me if I were *Mrs.* Daffodil Mendoza?"

"Yes. What of that?"

"Well, I am—but you didn't wait to hear that there is no Mr. Mendoza."

"He is dead?" Wasteneys asked, with a decent lowering of his voice.

"Yes—three years ago."

They were both respectfully silent for a moment before the shade of the late Mr. Mendoza.

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"You seemed so relieved that I was 'Mrs.' that I couldn't find it in my heart to disappoint you. And don't you remember saying that 'the worst of unmarried women was that they always wanted a man to marry them, and the worst of married women was that they were already married.' I couldn't say anything after that, could I?"

"But how sly of you not letting me come up to the door!"

"I should, if I had only known about that horrid telegram."

"Ah, you see! I mightn't have sent it then."

There was really a great comfort in Daffodil's simple materialism. As they presently sat at

luncheon on a gay balcony overlooking the Thames, merely to look across at her soothed his brain. She was just woman—unindividualised: as one might say "a bunch of flowers," yet not think it necessary to say what flowers they were. She was really very beautiful too, and quite a good-hearted, loving creature. As he looked at her, Wasteneys wondered if the men were not wisest who chose wives of the simple flower-like pattern, women who made no fantastic demands upon one's heart or brain, wives indeed of an Eastern pattern, child-women, asking only sunshine and sweetmeats and pretty things to wear, creatures of butterfly joy and April sorrow.

The Jews, profound students of women, declared that women had no souls, and, as Wasteneys sat with Daffodil drinking wine in the sun, he felt that the theory was true of most women, the women perhaps who were happiest and made most men most happy. But alas! there were also women who were in a painful process of evolution—the women who were developing souls!—and really threatened to go far beyond man in the process.

Meriel. . . .

CHAPTER XX.

AN OLD LOVE-DOCTOR.

IT was an old habit of Wasteneys to read in bed, particularly in the early morning, and his shelf of carefully selected bed-books was, so to say, a microcosm of his larger library. All his tastes were represented, and thus the concentrated eclecticism of the little collection provided many sharp, even quaint, contrasts, such as are more or less lost sight of in a larger collection. Perhaps some of the more classical books were there in reminiscence of the imitative taste of a grave reverential youth. He could not truthfully have said that the "Imitation of Christ" has ever meant to him what it seems to have meant to many others; nor, to take a very different book, which stood next to it, had he ever been able to read right through the merry—monotonous—tales

of Boccaccio. After the first few personal chapters, he had found the "Confessions of St. Augustine" ceasing to hold him. Nor had he long remained under the spell of these selections from Confucius. "The Pilgrim's Progress" had recently been added, under circumstances with which the reader is acquainted, but, after that first momentous dip into its pages, he had found no more messages. But there was a Theocritus of which he never tired, and a volume of Lamb, an "Opium-Eater," and, of course, a Shakespeare. Then there was an Apuleius, and a Montaigne, a "Tom Jones," a "Trois Mousquetaires," and "The Cloister and the Hearth." There were, too, a Bible and a Burns, a Keats and Byron's "Don Juan." There was a Shelley and a Rabelais. Of recent books there was a "Richard Feverel," a "Marius," a Walt Whitman, and Stevenson's "Underwoods." And there was some of the most delicate verse and prose from France.

Among the books which were there, as I have said, rather in obedience to traditional taste than to his own, was Burton's "Anatomy of Melancholy."

Burton is quite worth having for his own sake—there is no other such fascinating rag-bag in literature—but, of course, most of us bought our folios, in the first instance, to please Lamb. At all events, Wasteneys had done so, and he had to confess that his "Anatomy of Melancholy" had been upon his shelves for something like ten years, without his making more than an occasional dip into those yellow pages of strange tesselated learning. So books bide their time. For years they remain dry and lifeless for us, and then suddenly, in an accidental sunbeam, they are blossoming like Aaron's rod. It was literally owing to the accident of an early sunbeam momentarily lighting up the old leather—as though a golden finger was pointing out the neglected volume—that Wasteneys one early morning, soon after his return from Meriel, took down his "Anatomy," and lighted on the section which treats of Love-Melancholy, with such an odd mixture of grotesque learning, legendary illustration, dry humour, and no little common-sense.

Love-Melancholy: its causes, its symptoms, its cures. Alas! it was his very subject. He read of

Love's surprising power and extent, how the very minerals were not safe from its influence. He read of a peacock in Leucadia that had loved a maid, and of a crane in Majorca that had loved a Spaniard, of fishes that had pined away and waxed lean for love—"if Gomesius's authority be taken." He read of two palm-trees in Italy, the male growing at Brundesium, the female at Otranto, which remained barren till at last they grew high enough to see each other, "though many stadiums asunder." Such "fury" even is there "in vegetals"!

He read happy fairy tales of true love, as how "Rhodope, the fairest Lady in her days in all Egypt, went to wash her, and by chance (her maids meanwhile looking but carelessly to her clothes) an eagle stole away one of her shoes, and laid it in Psammetichus the King of Egypt's lap at Memphis; he wondered at the excellency of the shoe, and pretty foot, but more *aquilae factum*, at the manner of the bringing of it, and caused forthwith proclamation to be made, that she that owned that shoe should come presently to his Court; the Virgin came, and was forthwith married to the King."

Then sprigs of old verses set here and there, with such a freshness of contrast among all the crabbed learning, stirred his heart like the smell of gillyflowers:

> "The silly wren, the titmouse also,
> The little redbreast have their election,
> They fly I saw and together gone,
> Whereas hem list, about environ,
> As they of kinde have inclination,
> And as nature impress and guide,
> Of everything list to provide."

He read old stories of love's extremity: How "Stratocles the Physician, upon his Wedding day, when he was at dinner, could not eat his meat for kissing the Bride"; how "the Sultan of Sana's wife in Arabia, because Vertomannus was fair and white, could not look off him, from Sun-rising to Sun-setting she could not desist"; how "Galeatus of Mantua . . . when he was almost mad for love of a fair Maid in the City, she, to try him, belike, what he would do for her sake, bade him, in jest, leap into the River Po, if he loved her; he forthwith did leap headlong off the bridge, and was drowned"; how "Another at Ficinum in like

passion, when his Mistress by chance (thinking no harm I dare swear) bade him go hang, the next night at her doors hanged himself"; how some have taken a journey to Japan, for their love's sake; and how others have kept silence a whole twelvemonth, in obedience to their mistress's command. And many more like marvels.

He read with tears the laments of old lovers, such as this of Philostratus: "I am ready to die, Sweetheart, if it be thy will; allay his thirst whom thy star has scorched and undone; the fountains and rivers deny no man drink that comes; the fountain doth not say, thou shalt not drink, nor the apple, thou shalt not eat, nor the fair meadow, walk not in me, but thou alone wilt not let me come near thee, or see thee; contemned and despised, I die for grief."

He read, too, of that "honest Country-fellow (as Fulgosus relates it) in the Kingdom of Naples, at plough by the sea side, saw his wife carried away by Mauritanian Pirates, he ran after in all haste, up to the chin first, and when he could wade no longer, swam, calling to the Governor of the

ship to deliver his wife, or if he must not have her restored, to let him follow as a prisoner, for he was resolved to be a Galley-slave, his drudge, willing to endure any misery, so that he might but enjoy his dear wife. The Moors, seeing the man's constancy, and relating the whole matter to their Governor at Tunis, set them both free, and gave them an honest pension to maintain themselves during their lives."

But it was to the chapter on the "Cure of Love-Melancholy" that he turned with a mock-serious eagerness. Was there any help in this absurd old book for a modern mind diseased? Many lovers, he read, had found great benefit from eating "Cowcumber, Melons, Purselan, Water-Lilies, Rue, Woodbine, Ammi, and Lettice"—lettuce being specially recommended both by Lemnius and Mizaldus. Alas! his love was not of the kind to be allayed by cooling herbs. He must seek another cure. He read how Amatus Lusitanus cured a young Jew that was almost mad for love, with the syrup of Hellebore; and how highly Avicenna thought of blood-letting. He read of Leucata Petra, "that renowned

rock in Greece, of which Strabo writes,"—"from which if any Lover fling himself down headlong, he was instantly cured!" The ironical old scholar! So one might urge decapitation as an unfailing cure for toothache. He read, too, that "amongst the Cyziceni, there is a well consecrated to Cupid, of which if any lover taste, his passion is mitigated"; also he read of the river Selemnus, in Greece, which possessed like properties—"by reason of the extreme coldness belike," adds the satirical rogue.

If these and such other cures failed, there were but two others to try. The first, strongly recommended by Avicenna, is—*ut amanti cedat amatum*—that the lover be granted his desire! Arculanus is of the same opinion, and Burton agrees that Æsculapius himself cannot invent a better remedy. This, however, being a remedy not always within reach of unhappy lovers, Burton gives them this parting advice—that they "*wisely and warily unwind themselves.*"

When Wasteneys came to that, he put the book down with a smile and a sigh. The old book had

delivered its message. It had given him a new idea. Why not try—wisely and warily to unwind himself? The thought occupied him all day, and there was a curious smile on his face—a fighting smile, one might say.

CHAPTER XXI.

IN WHICH WASTENEYS COUNTS UP HIS FORCES.

WISELY and warily to unwind himself!

Excellent advice! But how shall one put it into practice! Ah! it is not so easy, old Dryasdust, living among the bookish shadows of human passions, as a botanist among dried flowers. This shrivelled, yellowing "specimen"—do you imagine that this is the rose? Have you never seen it in the morning with the dew on it? Ah! what a perfume it had, what a glory! and how the young heads would go dizzy with the smell of it. It is easy enough to resist it now, as it lies here pressed in your worm-eaten folio.

Easy to say, old man, but do you know what you are saying? O, it is to fight against all the sweetness of the world, to make yourself the enemy

of the very sweetest thing. To take your heart's desire by the throat, and strangle it slowly day by day. To long, till your heart almost breaks, for the sound of one voice, and yet to say: I will never hear it again—I desire to hear it no longer—I should hate to hear it again—it means nothing to me now; and then, suddenly, at some chance echo of it in your thought, to feel your whole will melt away and your whole soul crying like a child for its home—and all the fighting to be done over again!

Yet, of course, the old man is right. If it can only be done!

To fight one's way out of a dream. To plot an escape from one's joy. To find entirely new reasons for living, new incentives, new rewards. Literally to begin one's life again. No one can imagine that a light task. Yet to have conceived the bare idea of such a deliberate struggle was something—perhaps a great deal. Before Wasteneys' eyes had fallen upon that old love-doctor's wisdom, the mere idea of such a change in him would have seemed wild and unnatural. He had never thought of dis-

puting the instinctive, rather boyish, transcendentalism which had told him that in Meriel, for good or ill, he had found the final reason of his life; that outside her his life could have neither purpose nor joy, and that, losing her, he must inevitably lose himself. He had been accustomed to regard his love for her as a part of the mysterious, changeless order of things, an inviolable and sacred affinity. But he must now ask himself if, after all, this had not been a fancy, a fancy somewhat wilfully and wastefully indulged. He must now ask himself if life had not other purposes more serious and imperative for him—purposes in which this love had been but a passing shaping process, and purposes his fulfilment of which would in the end bring him satisfaction to which his love for Meriel would seem a toy.

"O, Meriel! Meriel! From to-day I must be your enemy. My heart must take up arms against itself."

But where were his weapons? What motive impulses had he to draw him from her, to range against the one imperious impulse that, with the

force of gravitation, drew him to her night and day.

He sighed. It almost seemed that he had none. Yet, without knowing it, he was already stronger than he thought—by a vague unformulated restlessness and rebellion in his soul. He had already conceived of escape, though it had been but an accidental thought full of pain—yet soon he would *desire* to escape. Then he would *determine*. Then, *perhaps*—by good fortune!—he would actually escape.

Meanwhile, he whimsically counted up his forces, drawing them up on paper in order of battle. On one side was that shining embattled name (O, face like a rose in armour!)

MERIEL,

on the other himself, assisted by:

(1) Religion. (Who knows?)

(2) Humour. (No use!)

(3) Another love. (Impossible—and yet——)

(4) Pride. (Nonsense!)

(5) Distraction. (A failure.)

(6) Anger. (Mere talk!)

(7) Literature. (Absurd—and yet, why not?)

As he thus reviewed his spiritual army, it presented but a sorry appearance to his mind. He knew too well that the whole cowardly host would take flight with one glance of Meriel's eyes. She had but to call his name, and the commander-in-chief would run to her, eager to throw down his arms.

All the same, that vague rebellion did not cease to stir within him; and those old words continued to work in his mind. Wisely and warily to unwind himself!

Meanwhile, he would try the drug distraction once more; which meant, though he was not aware of it, that he would play a little longer—till the reinforcements came up.

CHAPTER XXII.

MYRTLE ROME.

DISTRACTION meant nothing more dangerous than Daffodil Mendoza, and the renewal of a long-standing picturesque flirtation with Myrtle Rome. Myrtle Rome was one of those beautiful women that are flowers thrown up by a decaying adulterous aristocracy. The active forcible vices of her, at first sight, incongruous ancestors, and in fact quite near progenitors, had blossomed in her in a decorative romanticism. Through the medium of poetry and music and strange art, she played with sins which her family had taken more seriously, sins for which she herself had no gifts—merely a literary inclination. She was pretty, with a strangely fresh and innocent beauty, and she had a girlish *naïveté* of manner which masked the most eager vanity, and the hardest

of young hearts. She said daring things, but had never been known to do any. Myrtle had no senses beyond what she could satisfy in a keen and very cultivated passion for the orchids of modern art.

Yet, withal, she was a fascinating young creature —so long as one did not take her too seriously. Beautiful, exquisitely cultivated and very clever, she was a delicious human flower.

Her mother had been, and indeed still was, a famous beauty, the heroine of one of the most beautiful scandals of the period, and for her Wasteneys felt that respect which he always paid to sincerity. She had done what her daughter only dreamed of. The signatures of many passions were written upon her still beautiful face. Her daughter was merely a flowery shadow of her fiery mother. "It is your mother whom I really love," Wasteneys said one day to Myrtle, "the shadow of her in you. She has understood that the true romance is reality. You will never know romance because you are always seeking it. Real romance never thinks of itself by that name—any more than a hero would think of

calling himself a hero, or a saint be conscious of his halo."

They were sitting in a shaded corner of the garden at Myrtle's country home—where Wasteneys was spending a few summer days, as one of a little house-party—and Myrtle, who had quite a society reputation for her silver-points, was making a sketch of Wasteneys' head.

"Don't look so grim," she said; "you look like John Knox lecturing Queen Mary. Please look happy again. Do you always look so unhappy when you talk of romance? I'm afraid it's no use asking so serious a person to join my new club."

"What is that?" asked Wasteneys.

"It is called the Romantics. The members are to wear in secret a silver rose, and are to recognise each other by the blowing of a silver whistle. Representatives of all forms of romance are admitted to membership, the romance of daily life alone excepted. A sort of new Collegia d'Amore—you know."

"I see," said Wasteneys; "we should discourse on the divinity of love, and the best way of knotting

your lady's shoe tie, so that it cannot possibly come untied six times in one walk, and kindred subjects. Is that the sort of thing?"

"Just my idea."

"It might be amusing," said Wasteneys, thinking of the drug distraction; "suppose you all come down to Wasteneys for a week? The old place is lonely, and would be glad of some young faces."

"Now you're quite a dear again!" said Myrtle. "I should just love it."

"All right then, let's do it; and, when we are tired of the divinity of love, we can dress up and play lutes on the lake and row in the moonshine, and perhaps we can get Yaffle to raise the devil!

Yaffle was a charming young "kabbalistic" poet known to both of them.

"Better and better. Oh, will you do it?"

"Certainly," said Wasteneys, whimsically pursuing the idea, not without irony, "and we might produce a play exactly in the old way—without scenery, of course, and almost without actors! A real Celtic play—and we'll pronounce our lines as nearly as possible like the bards of the ninth century."

"How perfectly romantic!" exclaimed Myrtle, clapping her hands.

"And, of course, we'll crown the most beautiful woman, and carry her in a litter of sweet-smelling wood; and, who knows? perhaps some of us may find romance! But we must take care to ask no dull people. Only beautiful, serious people, with entertaining bees in their bonnets—who can dance and flirt as well. And we must have one really amusing man, a man who makes one laugh—and yet, curiously enough, never makes an epigram. And some of us—perhaps during the Celtic play—shall play at tin soldiers, like one poet, and some of us sail paper-boats on the lake, like another——"

Myrtle put down her sketch, so taken was she with this new serious frivolity. "Let's make out a list of people at once," she said.

By the time they had settled the list to their satisfaction, the long shadows were beginning to stretch across the grass. The little collaboration, frivolous as it was, had stirred up memories of an old May-time, none the less sweet because it had failed to keep its promise. Looking towards the

sun-dial that stood near them, Myrtle said, her musical voice purposely wistful with reminiscence: "I wonder what time it is at Aleppo."

It was one of those old dials which tells you the time, not only in your garden, but at Bagdad and at Constantinople, and Pekin, and many another old market of the world, and it had been one of Myrtle's fancies that *their* time should be reckoned from Aleppo. It sounded like the Arabian Nights!

Wasteneys smiled sympathetically, and he was not insensible to the charm of her fragrant youth.

"Ah! we almost loved each other, didn't we, Myrtle?"

"You never understood how much I loved you," said Myrtle, really half in earnest. In that summer afternoon light anyone else would have believed her.

"Little Myrtle," he said gently, "what a pity you are so romantic!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

UNEXPECTED HAPPINESS FOR ADELINE WOOD.

In that marshalling of his forces Wasteneys had necessarily not counted two allies—for how could he know that, morning and night, Father Selden and Adeline Wood named him very tenderly and appealingly in their prayers? Had he known, touched as, of course, he would have been, he might hardly have counted the prayer of another as a serious energy. For his rationalism still clung to him, in spite of his irrational possession. Yet, if Meriel could call to him across space and be heard, was it impossible to believe that the love of two friends might also project itself, if not indeed as a forcible pleading at the throne of God, still as a bracing sustaining wave of spiritual influence? If—as, of course, is common experience—friends can

strengthen each other as they talk together, the prayerful longing of one to help the other charging that other with a new vitality of determination or hope, and if, as will hardly be denied, the help then given has little to do with the spoken wisdom, but is mainly the mysterious passing of power from one to the other by the ethereal vibration of love; may we not hope that the currents of love are uninterrupted by distance, and that it is possible for one friend to send waves of help to another, however separated by space and time? The power of what we call prayer is partly that, and those who have entered into the secrets of the soul know that, just as we may save a friend from drowning by the energy of our straining arms, so we may sustain him in moments of spiritual peril by the energy of our resolute prayers. There may be still more mysterious efficacy in prayer, but surely that there is; and often, perhaps, when Wasteneys felt a new strength in him, it was some prayer of Father Selden's or Adeline Wood's that had just reached him after its journey through the air.

Day after day, night after night, in the solitude

of Wasteneys, Father Selden prayed for his son. Life was so simple there, so relieved from merely material pre-occupations, that an old man might, undisturbed, spend all his remaining energies in prayer—as some poets are privileged to spend their lives in the contemplation and expression of their vision of the world. Blessed privilege—beyond the privilege of poets—to devote one's life to the divine art of prayer!

His life was growing near to its end. If he might only see his son, the son of his old dear friend, safe within the arms of the Divine Love, the love that went seeking him so patiently, so tenderly, through the years: then the old man could cheerfully sing his *Nunc dimittis*.

When he heard from Wasteneys that the sad old home was once more to be filled with young voices, it seemed to him that his prayer had come a step nearer to fulfilment. For, as he said to himself: "Man comes back to God with cheerfulness, with laughter and singing." The clouds of obscuring sorrow were passing, and the beams of the divine joy were breaking through. Wasteneys indeed had

not thought of the visit of the Romantics to Wasteneys in that way; but perhaps the old Father was right, after all. The soul steals back to God in many shamefaced disguises, in frivolous masques, and idle dances. Then suddenly it falls upon its knees!

Adeline's prayers were less definitely theological; for prayer with her was rather the survival of a girlish habit than the exercise of a living faith. Straightly catechised she would have proved, it is to be feared, a sad heretic, but so much religious force had been stored in her by a religious ancestry that she went on praying all the same. Had she known of Father Selden's prayers, the last thing she could have wished would have been an answer to them—for English nonconformity was still, unconsciously, a strong prejudice in her blood. Her prayer for Wasteneys was very simple. "O help him to be good," she prayed, "and give him his joy."

Give him *his* joy! It was an unselfish prayer; for, though Adeline knew nothing definitely of his story, she knew, particularly after "The Love-

Letters of the King," all a woman need know. His joy she knew could not be hers, except in her secret heart—because it was his. She never allowed herself to acknowledge to herself that she loved Wasteneys. When she had taken up her bachelor life, her attitude had been—and partly no doubt at the time sincerely so—that of many modern women, who profess the independent blessedness of the female unit. As if woman, born to be a wife and a mother, could find a substitute in bookbinding! Of course, in her heart Adeline knew better. She was only rational in self-defence. She was ready—O! so ready—to be a simple wife-woman the moment she dare be it in safety. If only the man she loved had loved her! But to that fancy, with the heroic self-repressive power of some women, she gave no ear. Indeed, as far as Wasteneys was concerned, it had hardly at any time been so definite as a fancy. In her vision of the future she saw herself strenuously unmated, distilling from life her own lonely satisfactions, and dependent for her excitements on the reflected joys and sorrows of others.

The fourth-born of six sisters, this was a Spartan ideal with which she had already made acquaintance in girlhood. It is seldom that six sisters of a family can hope all to eat of the tree of marriage. The attractive fruit on that tree is soon exhausted, and, naturally, the beautiful elder sisters—or, not unlikely, some suddenly maturing younger sister—gather the fairest, before the others have any interest in the fruit at all. Three of Adeline's sisters were already mothers, and Adeline had thus approached to the joys of motherhood by the nearness of an aunt.

One day, while Wasteneys was planning "The Romantics" with Myrtle, Adeline received a letter from one of these married sisters living in the country, that made her face flush with a happy, half ashamed, rose-colour, which it was a pity Wasteneys had not been there to see. This sister, some twelve months before, had given birth to a little girl; and since then her health had been very frail. She had too a little son of four. Now the doctor had ordered her away to the south, and she wrote to know, if, while she was away with her

husband, Adeline would take care of her house and her two little children. Could she be spared from her bookbinding?

If Adeline had suddenly been whispered that she was going to be a mother herself, she could hardly have been more excited than by this news. Why! she would be almost a mother—a sort of transfigured aunt, at all events. To be all day long with little children—little fairy children—to watch their minds opening like flowers, to listen to them trying to talk, like birds trying to sing. O! this was luck, for a poor girl with no babies of her own—wasn't it? She almost forgot to be sorry for her sister's illness. Her real thought was that she was going to be a mother by proxy! She couldn't afford to sigh that it was only by proxy. She was grateful that it should be as it was. "Yes! Yes! Yes!" she telegraphed back immediately, "only too happy!"

And that was the reason why she couldn't accept Wasteneys' invitation to the Romantics, which came five minutes after she had sent her telegram.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"THE ROMANTICS" AT WASTENEYS.

BEFORE writing this chapter I have sought high and low among the curiosity shops, scanned catalogues, telegraphed famous dealers—for "any pen used by Thomas Love Peacock." A famous lady collector, with an optimism which seldom disappoints one, promises me one within a month. Unfortunately, however, I cannot wait so long. I have already delayed this chapter for a full fortnight, and it can wait no longer. If I only dared to ask Peacock's literary grandson—to lend me for one day the pen that wrote "The New Republic"! But then I dare not, though, judging by his later books, he does not seem nowadays to have much use for it himself, and, therefore, might perhaps spare it me—if I only had the courage to ask.

Well, I haven't, so I must do the best I can with my own pen.

The list of guests which Myrtle Rome and Wasteneys had drawn up that afternoon in the garden comprised the following:

(1) A young Polish musician who played upon a curious heart-shaped violin of his own invention, with a bow made from the hair of the women who had loved him.

(2) A novelist who vivisected his heart, regardless of his sufferings—for his own amusement.

(3) A famous lady faith-healer—who was also beautiful.

(4) An illustrious devil-worshipper, on a visit from Paris.

(5) An esoteric dramatist who said he was greater than Shakespeare, and who found many to believe him.

(6) A poet so exquisitely gifted that not merely did he shrink from the paper and print of customary publication, but would consent only to communicate his poems once a year, in a musical whisper, to a

carefully-chosen audience, not exceeding twelve, in a room specially designed for the purpose, in which shape and colour, the degree and fall of the light, and the regulation of the temperature, were all nicely adjusted to the poem thus revealed. For, as will be obvious to any but the coarsest artistic perception, the ear which is to receive the divine voice must be, in its kind, as exquisite as the voice itself. Actually, as this poet was in the habit of maintaining, one really needed a different room for the revelation of each poem, and a different audience—though those were conditions difficult to compass. The very complexions of the listeners had a subtle effect on the revelation of his poems, and he has been known to attribute the failure of one of his poems to the lack of green in the eyes of the ladies present.

(7) A young French painter, who, finding it impossible to work in daylight, had made a curious little habitation for himself in one of the disused sewers of Paris; his subterranean salon being one of the most fashionable rallying points of all the advanced movements.

(8) A dandy who dressed in the manner of the Regency, but was so witty that nobody minded.

(9) Lady Caroline Wenlock (10) Miss Black. (11) Mrs. Williamson. (12) and (13) The Misses Waters. (14) Miss Knowles.	Beautiful women.

Myrtle Rome and Wasteneys completed the company.

The contributions of these sixteen members to the seven days' session of the club can be more or less readily imagined from the brief descriptions attached to their names. Lacking the two pens I have referred to, I shall not venture on any detailed account of the transactions. Myrtle read a bright paper: "On the Influence of Beautiful Names upon the Affections," and Wasteneys discoursed on "Recent Improvements in the Navigation of Paper Boats."

But there were two papers of real importance, which demand a fuller record. The first was a paper by the Esoteric Dramatist, entitled "The

Vowelisation of the Drama"; and the second was a startling deliverance by the Vivisection Novelist, entitled "A Possible Duty Toward the Beloved."

The Esoteric Dramatist advanced that the essence of true drama lay in the stage directions, and that the drama of the future would consist mainly of interjections—provided with explanatory stage directions. Music and poetry—even painting—he went on, had been reduced to a primary symbolism of the five vowels: "A, noir; E, blanc; I, rouge; O, bleu; U, vert." Now the drama was no less reducible to the same simple terms. The drama was, so to say, the A-E-I-O-U of human action. Unconsciously, no doubt, the earliest playwrights had written their plays in five acts—five acts, five vowels; no mere coincidence. Each act represented a human cry under given circumstances—which it was the business of the stage directions to interpret. Latterly, dramatists had been content with three acts, and here no doubt he must seem whimsical, even flippant, yet he could not forbear to note the correspondence between the last three

vowels and the three acts of the modern social, seventh commandment, drama.

Act I. I! (Stage directions of at least twenty pages.)

Act II. Oh! (Stage directions of at least twenty pages.)

Act III. You! (Stage directions of at least twenty pages.)

He did not, of course, offer this as a serious illustration, but it really did jocularise his serious meaning.

The paper, which was very brief and confessedly experimental, was illustrated by a performance of one of the Esoteric Dramatist's own plays—entirely without actors. The play was entitled "Why Did You?" and threw the audience into fits of laughter. The proceedings concluded with the author making a speech, in which (under some misconception of dissent from an entirely delighted audience) he defied an inattentive universe to prevent his writing as many more plays of the same kind as he had a mind to!

Then he returned to his normal state as one of the most charming men alive.

The Novelist's paper on "A Possible Duty Toward the Beloved" was of so unexpected a character, and had indeed, for a while, so great an influence upon at least one of its hearers that I shall give it more or less complete. I should explain that it was more or less well known to the company that the novelist had suffered much extremity from love, and it will be imagined that his paper, therefore, brought with it a delightful thrill of autobiography, and even a little shudder. His stern suffering face plainly showed that he was theorising from a drama not yet completed. He began by placing a beautiful little revolver upon the table—merely, of course, as a symbol, and thus proceeded:

"The longer one studies life the less one comes to value the reasoned action of human beings, and the more one comes to value that instinctive action which reason has so often (and particularly during the last two centuries) depreciated and attempted to discredit. When one really reflects, can one say that any of the important actions and motives of human beings are reasonable actions and motives? Is our joy, properly speaking, reasonable?

Is our sorrow reasonable? Are the duties reasonable to which we abandon ourselves, without a thought of the tragic self-sacrifice involved? Seriously speaking, we can give no good reason for any of our important actions or preoccupations; for the primary human operations there are no *reasons*. Consider the most important of all human feelings—human love. Consider it in what form you will. Say in its purest form: the love of a mother for a child. What can be less reasonable than an affection which entails upon the mother so constant and so wearing a sacrifice of her own personal comfort and pleasure, and which inexorably destines her to so pitiless a disillusionment? There may seem to be more reason for the love of a man for a woman and a woman for a man, and yet in its apparent origin what could be less reasonable? A reasonable love would be one which selected for its object a being whom it regarded as the most beautiful and generally the most worthy of her sex. It is true that a lover loves, because he is under an impression that such is the object of his passion; but that impression

is one that has not come to him through his reason, but through some other medium of spiritual apprehension, which overrules the reason—the reason not uncommonly, in cases of the strongest passion, entering its serious protest in vain. Reason, it must be remembered, is an impersonal standard of values. It is not yours or mine. It belongs to the general intellectual equipment of mankind; and its results are as little influenced by individual preferences as, say, a barometer is influenced by its possessor's desire for fair weather. There is no such thing as your reason, and my reason. There is only reason. And, that being so, if love were reasonable, all the men in the world would be in love with one woman—that is the woman who, according to the tests of reason, was the most worthy of being loved.

"Then, too, if love were reasonable, would it set its affections upon an object that is so subject to the change and wear of life as man and woman; subject to death, and to an ante-mortem disintegration even more painful to the eyes of a lover?

"Then, to leave for a moment the consideration

of Love, what are the other motive forces of Human Life? Religion, War, the Desire of Fame. Is there any need to labour the unreasonableness of these powerful and august influences? Religion has been, and rightly, the bitter foe of Reason from the beginning. Rightly understood, Religion is the Formulated Adoration of the Unutterably Unreasonable, the Blessed Belief in the Divinely Incredible. What we value in War are its superhuman, *unreasonable*, moments; moments when men seem to take more delight in giving their lives than in taking the lives of others—moments of transfigured suicide: divine irresponsible charges, forlorn last stands of heroes. Were War a reasonable institution, it would have ceased two thousand years ago. And is war even so unreasonable as the desire for fame?—the desire of one who despises his contemporaries to have his name upon the lips of future fools.

"If you say I have omitted the most imperative of all human motives—The Desire to Live, merely for its own sake—whether happily or not, with Love or without, with Religion, with Fame, or without; surely we have there summed up in one

comprehensive absurdity the radical unreasonableness of human existence.

"What we call civilisation is the unsuccessful attempt of the reason to supplant the motive forces of human life; the attempt, one might say, remembering the old fable, of the brain to do away with the very organs that make possible, by their conveyance of its humble nutrition, its aristocratic designs. So might some proud flower plot against the coarse processes going on at its root.

"If this reasoning is correct, it follows that what men have done for generations, simply, unreasonably, has some deep, essentially, perhaps mysterious, basis for its being done. Men have loved and prayed and fought since the beginning; and, in spite of the long interference of reason, they are loving and praying and fighting with not less, perhaps even more, vehemence to-day than ever.

"It was necessary to trouble you with this general vindication of the unreasonableness of all essential human action, to prepare you for a theory which will, doubtless, at first sight seem a little startling, though, on second thoughts, you will see that it is

not so much a theory as a law deduced from the very general immemorial practice of humanity.

"Since the world began, men and women have loved each other—and among the many and various manifestations of love since the beginning is one, indeed terrible, yet perhaps not entirely inexplicable (allowing for the mystery of the whole subject), for which I would beg a deeper consideration than has perhaps been extended to it before: namely that, as men and women have loved from the beginning, just as surely have men and women killed each other for love—and, in disregard of religion or social laws, felt themselves justified in doing so."

At this point the novelist paused to drink a glass of water. Involuntarily he caressed his revolver, and an agreeable shudder passed through his audience.

"*And felt themselves justified in doing so!*" he repeated, with emphasis, as he continued: "There is no need to produce historical instances of this familiar human phenomenon. They range from the earliest classics to the latest murder trial of our day. Only a week ago I read of a labouring man

who had murdered his wife because he had discovered her infidelity. He confessed his guilt, but entirely without contrition. 'I would do it again,' he said, and a reporter present noted a curious light as of a fanatical idealism upon his face. 'Brute!' you say, and 'brute' no doubt he was; but, all the same, the scientific observer may see in his action the working of an outraged idealism of which it would be easy to find more decorative, but not more suggestive, examples. Within recent memory an American millionaire murdered his wife's lover under similar circumstances; and, strange as it may seem, the sympathy of the court was with him, and he received but a slight sentence. 'Brute!' no doubt again, and I wish it to be understood that I am not justifying these, or any, particular instances. I am only noting examples of a familiar human phenomenon, and I note them for the purpose of this general question: 'Allowing that all such love-murders as I have mentioned are far from being worthy illustrations of the law, do they not, nevertheless, proceed from some deep-seated instinct in human nature which tells us all—however "brutal,"

however "civilised"—that there are certain offences against love, certain spiritual disloyalties (of which the physical are but shadows) for which there is no reparation but that of death?'"

The speaker paused again, and then proceeded once more amid the held breath of his audience:

"Such examples as I have given must be taken in the same spirit as we take the crude theological symbolism of savage tribes. We say that, uncouth and often terrible as such symbolism is, yet it hints at a divine idea. And you will see from this illustration that it has been profitable to take such crude examples of love-murder as I have given, rather than examples more canonised by romance, for the reason that the human sacrifices of a savage are robuster witnesses to a divine presence in the universe than the rose-water devotions of a dean. The less sophisticated the creature in which we find these manifestations of mysterious things, the more powerful is their witness. Now, as it is likely that the savage has not always sacrificed the right people or to the right gods, so it must often have happened that the terrible idealism which we are considering

has too often sacrificed the wrong victim, from the wrong motive. Men, no doubt, have murdered their wives and their wives' lovers from a low sense of the invasion of their material property—property which, spiritually speaking, was never theirs by any consent of the being so imagined as their possession. Women have murdered men from a like erroneous belief—on, so to say, invalid documents of the heart. Our concern is not with these mistakes in the working of what appears to be an eternal law, but our interest is in the law itself. Our question is: Whether there really is such a law, essentially a spiritual law, frequently expressing itself, like other laws, grotesquely, unjustly, but still a law having for its end some mysterious perfection of which we cannot even dream.

"I will beg leave to draw one last illustration from a piece of literature with which you will all be familiar. It is a play by a famous Spanish dramatist of our own time, which I may say that I first read with considerable distaste. The theme seemed so crudely barbaric. One felt that it was time for a serious dramatist to leave such themes

for the common theatre. But, as I have since pondered the play, it seems to me that, whether it was intentional with the dramatist or not—and I am inclined to think it was not—there is behind the barbarism of his dramatic symbols a spiritual meaning which is eternally valid in the relations of men and women.

"A certain Spanish gentleman, of very ancient and distinguished family, a man of noble, if somewhat stern, character, is married to a beautiful but somewhat weak girl. She takes a lover, and in due course the husband discovers the *liaison*. Although the custom of his country would justify his putting both the guilty ones to death, he refrains, and in a spirit, so to say, of stern tenderness, he forgives his wife—whose weak soul is in a bewilderment 'twixt right and wrong and craves his strong direction—on the condition that if she ever finds herself tempted again she will come and tell him. She does find herself so tempted, and in the moment she comes and tells her husband. On hearing it, and realising, one may suppose, that her weakness is not passing, but permanent, he, with great gentleness, shoots

her through the heart—calmly; not merely as her husband, but as her judge and her executioner. Of course, it is terrible, and at first one revolts from it. Yet, as one ponders the situation, one may come to see that it is rather the form under which it is presented than the situation itself that revolts one. We have outgrown the formulæ. We no longer recognize this mediæval marital proprietorship in woman. Allowing, however, for the provincialism in time and space of the form, is not the play the shadow-show of an eternal situation, the crisis of an eternal issue? If one imagines the parts reversed, one gets rid of the confusing historical, economical features. Let the man be the law-breaker, the woman the executioner. It is all one. And for the old childish 'pride of birth' and marital proprietorship, let us substitute a spiritual dignity and a mutual spiritual proprietorship of soul in soul, a proprietorship freely given, and never, not even in the moment of disloyalty, denied. Man and woman alike has said: 'I belong to you for ever and ever, in the light of the holiest revelation of life. There is nothing of me which is not yours.

If I give a hair of my head to another, I am worthy of death, and were I so to profane the law of our love, I should not wish to live a moment after. If I be weak and seem to desire unworthy life after this sin, if I fail and faint and seem to desire no longer the high levels on which we walked together, O, my beloved, be you my executioner, and carry my dead body in your arms to heaven.' "

One more brief pause, and the novelist ended, somewhat abruptly, shaken with evident emotion. He had several more pages to read, but he hurriedly passed these over, and, reading only the last, thus concluded: "Love is an idealism, a thing of ideal joys and sorrows; but, in the expression of these ideal joys and sorrows, it employs material vessels which become holy and inviolable by that sacred use. Profanation of the vessel is profanation of the spirit. And, if love be allowed physical joy, it must also be meted physical punishment. For love veritably operates as a transubstantiation:

> " 'I know not thy soul from thy body,
> Neither our love from God.'

The sin of the body thus becomes the sin of the

soul. Let us not deceive ourselves in this. Nor let us, if ever the occasion arise, weakly spare the body of the beloved. Let us do our stern duty —though we must still their beating hearts with fearful fire. Love lays upon us many duties. O, may he leave us free from this last duty towards our Beloved."

This paper produced a profound sensation among its listeners, a sensation to which the novelist was as profoundly indifferent, evidently wrapped in a bitter dream. He cut off all possibility of intrusive discussion by stalking from the room, revolver in hand, on the conclusion of his paper. Presently he was seen walking across the moonlit lawn, in the direction of the lake. There were those who feared that he might never return.

"How do you drag a lake?" asked pretty Lady Constance Wenlock of her companion, with obvious allusiveness. "One often reads of it in novels. I wonder if they have a set of the proper fishing tackle, would you call it, here at Wasteneys— grappling irons, of course, I mean. I have never seen them. It would be exceedingly interesting."

"Is the lake very deep?" asked Miss Black, hopefully.

"I should think so," answered Mrs. Williamson.

"His hair would make it easier to find him," said the Misses Waters, sympathetically.

"But I think he will shoot himself," said Miss Knowles; "he seemed so fond of that little revolver."

So beautiful women talk when left to themselves.

The novelist, however, was to prove a disappointment. Had anyone had the curiosity, or humanity, to follow him, they would have observed him a quarter of an hour later coldly correcting proofs of his paper by the light of an exceptionally brilliant moon. He had read, of course, from a tear-stained manuscript—knowing what was expected of him—but in his pocket all the time he had carried the proof received that morning from the editor of a fashionable monthly magazine. And yet his paper had been a sincere utterance all the same; for, as Miss Black told Mrs. Williamson in confidence, it was well-known that a certain actress had treated

him with a cruelty that would have made Caligula turn pale with envy.

Indeed, that proof-correcting by the light of the moon was anything but what at first sight it may have seemed to mean. It was a last indignity of prosaic irony in a peculiarly cramped and inclement career. It meant only that the Vivisection Novelist was an exquisitely unpopular writer, who, by the inharmonious conjunction of an accident in his early life and the bad taste of the public, was doomed to support a wife and three children on the literary proceeds of a subsequent dream. If he thus corrected proofs in haste, it was merely lest he should miss the early morning post.

The fact that "A Possible Duty Towards the Beloved" was to be published in a monthly magazine must not be allowed to obscure its serious import. Wasteneys was perhaps the only one who divined its sincerity, and understood, in some degree, its dark idealism. Though he had never formulated them, he was conscious, as he listened, that feelings very like those expressed by the novelist had moved dimly in the background of his mind; and he could

not resist the impulse next morning to confide something of his own story to one who, evidently, had passed through a like experience.

The novelist's comment on his confidence was brief and to the point:

"You must either kill her—or forget her. There is no other way."

And presently he added: "If you can forget, you are more fortunate than I am. . . . Between ourselves, I intend to kill. I am only waiting till I can afford it; that is, till I can leave my wife and family properly provided for. . . . Then . . ."

Kill, or forget!

The words haunted Wasteneys for many a day.

Kill, or forget! The novelist's advice plainly was to kill. Curiously, the very next day this thing happened.

For years back every new possessor of Wasteneys had understood that Blue-Bell Hollow, for certain months of the year, was the camping-ground of the Smith tribe of gipsies. The visit of "The Romantics" chanced to fall during that period. Naturally, everyone wanted their fortunes told—

particularly Myrtle. So the whole club repaired in a body to the little colony of basket-makers, palmists, and poultry-thieves, in Blue-Bell Hollow.

There is, happily, no need to describe a gipsy encampment. In presence of so familiar a scene the writer may rest from his labours and leave the reader to conjure up for himself Romany pictures according to his fancy. Among the Smiths there were three women, variously marked by weather and middle-age, who were credited with the gift of sortilege; but there was one who was unmistakably the high priestess. She had a beautiful worn, eagle face, and it was obvious that hers was a mind which merited a larger sphere of operation. Nature had evidently meant her to tell the fortunes of people of quality, leaving to the other augurs the long and tedious annals of the poor. Certainly she was a quick reader of character. Myrtle, at all events, she read at a glance.

"Ah! noble lady," she said, "no one will ever break your heart—though you will break many."

Myrtle was so flattered that she gave the seer half-a-crown instantly. Nothing flatters one like

the imputation of a hard heart. The secret ambition of us all is to feel nothing—except keen joy in torturing the feelings of others. It is our misfortune that so much congenital Christianity makes the rôle of Nero so difficult for the modern man or woman. We feel—in spite of the most inhuman resolutions. How cruel we would be—if we only could. Alas! old kindness in our blood compels us to be kind.

When the seer approached Wasteneys, he shook his head.

"No! no!" he said, "I know my doom."

"I know it too," answered the gipsy, with ready wit; and in spite of himself Wasteneys became interested, because, of course, he really didn't know.

"You may know it," added the gipsy, "but I could help you all the same."

Wasteneys laughed, but, so superstitious had he become, that later on in the day he found himself wandering, with aimless aim, in the neighbourhood of Blue-Bell Hollow. The gipsy was on the look out.

"I expected you," she said.

"O, nonsense!" said Wasteneys.

"As you will, sir!—but I know her face as well as you know it."

Wasteneys started.

"I could show it you this minute," she added.

"Show it me then," he said, half in earnest.

"Will you walk with me a little way to a more quiet place?"

They came to a bend of the little stream—from which long ago Meriel had taken the water for their morning coffee. Here it was a deep, silent pool, darkened by a circle of tall elms. It was muddied, for there the cattle came to drink. At this hour it was very lonely and still.

The gipsy took a little phial from her bosom, and poured a few drops into the dark pool. As she did so, it instantly cleared, and became a pellucid mirror.

"Look down there," she said, "and tell me what you see."

"I see only my own face," said Wasteneys in a moment.

"Wait, and go on looking."

Presently she asked again, noticing that Wasteneys' face had grown attentive, even startled: "Do you see anything?"

"O, God!" was his only answer, as he went on looking.

"I will tell you what you see," said the woman. "You see a meadow in the early morning, and in the meadow a woman is gathering mushrooms. She has black hair, and large—very large—dark eyes. Now she raises her head, and—she is looking at you . . . "

"O God!" cried Wasteneys, and turned his eyes away.

"Will you look again?" said the woman.

He looked again, and there in the pool was Meriel sitting by the sea playing upon her violin, as he had seen her last.

"You are only reading my thoughts," he said impatiently. "I have seen all this before."

"Look again," said the woman quietly.

He looked, and out of the depths of the pool came the shadowy aisles of a Gothic church. From the centre presently grew and grew a soft light,

and, as his eyes became used to it, he saw a chancel lit with many candles. Then he became conscious of sad figures kneeling. Then at last he saw a white figure lying among flowers. A dead, beautiful woman—lying among flowers. Suddenly it seemed that she opened her eyes and spoke.

It was Meriel!—but what she said he could not hear.

"What does she say?" he asked the gipsy involuntarily.

"I cannot hear!" she answered—and then a shoal of small fishes troubled the pool and the vision passed away in muddy ripples.

Wasteneys turned from the pool as one who comes out of a dream. The familiar meadows and riverside seemed suddenly strange to him. In the sun-reddened twilight the gipsy looked like some ancient prophetess, and there was something almost motherly tender in the way she looked at him. It was strange, too, to think that she was the only one in the world who really knew his story.

"Mother!" he said involuntarily, "you have seen her face. What am I to do?"

"Poor Child of the Dark Star," she said "you can never be really happy. But I can help you in a sad way."

"How?"

"I can help you to forget."

"How?"

"See! in this packet is Forgetfulness"—and she drew a little white packet from the folds of her dress.

"Dissolve a few grains of this in a glass of golden wine, every time you feel you must think of her . . . and, if you cannot forget her, it will soon become a joy to remember."

"Must I forget?" asked Wasteneys; "is there no other way?"

"There is only one other," she said, significantly, and Wasteneys thought of the novelist.

"Only that," she answered. "Shall I help you to that? Love is very strange. It is a noble way."

"Leave me, mother," said Wasteneys, throwing himself down upon the grass. "Leave me."

For long he lay there in a reverie. The world

grew more and more spectral with the thickening dusk. An owl began to whistle from a neighbouring copse. Presently he roused himself, and his hand touched a small white object. It was the packet—of Forgetfulness. He picked it up and turned homewards.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE GREAT DUEL.

MOST men of character begin life with a sturdy belief in their control of their own destiny, and, like one setting out upon a journey, they scan the map of existence, choose their destination, and mark out the route they propose to take. If they avoid the one conclusive accident of death, they probably reach their destination, but—by how different a route than the one proposed. And the destination, when now it is reached, how different it seems. Indeed, little of the original destination is left but its name, and, if they have preserved the map of their original route, how scored over it is with sudden divergence here, and huge circumambulation there; and what a history of unforseen circumstance has been the whole dusty yet marvellous journey.

Indeed, looked back upon, it seems a series of spiritual ambushes; at every turn of the road some masked purpose of God. There are those who early in the pilgrimage perceive the vanity of their boyish maps, and, tearing them in four, cease to affect knowledge of their itinerary, throwing the reins upon the necks of their horses. Why affect control of them, when, every few miles, some dark or shining rider will suddenly sweep out upon the way and take the reins in his imperious hands. And sometimes how slight the causes of divergence. A butterfly flitting suddenly into a bye-way, a wandering scent, a song a hundred yards away from the high-road, and then another and still another, and always another hundred yards away. Then too the many false destinations that one takes for the real destination, the fair or difficult places where we loiter, then camp, then build, then marry, which must someday prove no real destinations after all, and be left behind.

Again, sometimes it may seem that, in passionate pursuit of some bye-way, we have forgotten our original destination, forgotten it with joy, nay even

deliberately renounced it; the road we are now taking seems so absolutely other; or perhaps, with bitter sorrow, we see ourselves irresistibly carried further and further from the highway of our purpose. Yet, all the time, whether we be glad or sorry to have wandered, the mysterious guides are surely leading us to the one predestined goal.

When Wasteneys had drawn up his forces in battle-array against Meriel, as we saw in a previous chapter, he had, it may be remembered, included "Anger" and "Pride" with derisive comments. He had not then foreseen what reinforcements unexpected circumstance might bring to those despised branches of the service. Nor had he realized the significance of his merely naming them, however ironically, among his forces. That he should even have thought of them meant far more than he understood. Evidently there had been some vague feelings moving dimly at the back of his mind, which had at last so far succeeded in asserting themselves as to suggest his giving them names. A few months ago he could not have conceived of anger—even in jest—against Meriel. Anger against—*Meriel!* That had seemed,

indeed, an inconceivable sacrilege. For was she not the embodiment of the Divine Principle in his life, the queen that could do no wrong? He had blamed himself even for that first whisper of criticism deep down in his mind, and he had hushed it sternly as one hushes profane thoughts in a church. And as to "Pride"—what indeed was he that he should rebel against the mysterious behaviour of the Divine?

Destiny, however, which does really seem to take a surprising interest in our very unimportant human affairs, had, it would appear, sent down that frivolous club of "Romantics" to Wasteneys with a more serious purpose than any proposed by Myrtle Rome.

Not indeed as direct counsel, but as indirect suggestion, that paper of the Vivisection Novelist's had no little influence upon Wasteneys. To begin with, it brought clearly into his consciousness the reality of that eternal duel of the sexes, which a year or two before he would either have denied altogether, from sheer ignorance, or declared done away with by the so-called emancipation of woman;

as if that "emancipation" meant anything more than a temporary advantage of one party to the duel—a temporary advantage of the eternal coquetry of woman, expressing itself indeed more seriously than heretofore, or rather with more pretentiousness, but essentially no more serious than any such advantage gained by woman over man since the beginning.

What does the "emancipation" of woman mean, except that woman has now discovered that her mind is available for purposes of overcoming man as well as her body? The female mind, however remarkable, however skilfully it may imitate the male, is only an advanced form of chiffons. It is merely one more lure, one more honey-guide, for the desired man-bee. For woman is eternally a flower—and what a beautiful destiny!—a flower that must await the choice, and do the pleasure, of her lord the bee, both together serving thus the cosmic will.

And in this duel Wasteneys began to conceive that it was necessary for *the man to win;* or, at all events, that, in the interests of the universe, the

issue must at worst be a draw, and that man should be conquered was a disgraceful accident not permissible even to consider.

A duel. Yes! a very serious duel. And, as he pondered on this new thought that had come to him, he began slowly to recognise a certain deep-seated primal hatred between the sexes. It almost seemed as if it was hatred rather than love that kept the sexes together; or as if, at all events, along with the instinct that bound them in apparent bonds of love, went a corresponding re-sentment that they should thus be bound, as it were, in spite of themselves. Among the other animals, who has failed to observe that hatred, toothed and clawed, often follows the tenderest union of love? It would almost seem as if two everlasting irreconcilable enemies have, as by a love philtre, been tricked into a truce of humiliating caresses—solely for the advantage of a third party, whom we call Nature. Perhaps the female really hates the male, and the male the female, but, for her own mysterious purpose, Nature throws over each a scented cloud of illusion, which, when her strange

work is done, disperses, to the mutual humiliation of the two helpless instruments.

Whether or not this be a true theory, at all events Wasteneys, with some surprise, found himself growingly rebellious against this "divine" revelation that for so long had ruled his life. Seditious thoughts, which made his better self shudder, began to fill his mind. Once, in a hushed midnight, soon after the departure of "The Romantics," he said to himself, scarcely above his breath: "After all, *a Man is something*—be Woman what she may!"

Growing bolder, he even ventured upon the assertion that, miraculous as Meriel was, he, Pagan Wasteneys was also something—something entitled to consideration in the scheme of things, a being too with a duty *towards himself*, even an imperative duty, in which he could only fail at immortal peril. But it was with no light heart that he thus timorously ventured to formulate, step by step, so iconoclastic a philosophy. O, God of Love!—was he indeed an atheist; was he, a mere mortal, daring to ask questions? He covered his face—expectant of, even

hoping for, the lightning. Yet how superfluous is any external punishment of the questioner of divine things. Poor persecuted explorer, the agony of *finding out* is pain and penalty enough. Were it not better to suffer under the protection of an illusion, than thus to suffer on behalf of so weary a truth. Why trouble to be free? Slavery at least had its rewards. Where are the rewards of freedom? "The reward of freedom," cried his soul, "is to be free!" Alas! the reward had an abstract sound.

Yes! it almost seemed sometimes as if it was not so much himself that was fighting this battle, as some universal principle that was using him on behalf of the Everlasting Male.

Ancestral instincts of dominance thus unexpectedly came to his aid, instincts which, but a short time ago, he would have "reasoned" away; and at this moment he came upon a philosopher, who was evidently too ill-balanced to be taken without many reservations, but one of whose phrases persisted hatefully in his mind: "Thou goest to woman, remember thy whip." But a short time ago he

would have hated this phrase with his whole soul; and he was much disquieted to note the change in him which allowed him even mentally to tolerate it. To him the idea of any form of arrogant mastership of one being over another had always been painful. Apart from any of those considerations which sound more serious, but perhaps do not go deeper, it jarred his sense of courtesy. Even the accepted lordship of man over the animals had been to him an unwelcome thought, and to thrash a dog or to "break" a horse had always hurt something in him, which resented this arrogant interference of one species with the native liberty of another; whether or not the subservience of the one and the lordship of the other had been scripturally or scientifically decreed. All, higher and lower, were so evidently servants of a mysterious universe, in which perhaps the distance between a man and a dog was so slight, compared with the distance between man and unknown supernal beings, that to some high-watching unseen eye man's arrogant assertion of it might well seem supremely ridiculous and pathetic.

For the man, therefore, who had felt thus about the very animals, it was necessarily surprising and painful for him to find something unreasoning within him suddenly asserting the lordship of man over woman, and saying over with a certain complacence the phrase I have quoted. No doubt it was only a reaction from the other extreme in which so long he had resided, and really amounted to nothing more than a reassertion of his own independence violently made.

But the feeling, however open to criticism, served its purpose in that it contributed to the energy necessary for that wise and wary unwinding of himself which the old love-doctor had advised. It seemed a coarse way with Meriel, but some gossamers are so closely spun about the captive soul that they can only be severed with a sword—or even a common hatchet. But the pain of cutting these gossamers! They were no longer like exterior bonds, but thrilling silken strings, each one of which seemed to pass through his heart. Wasteneys, indeed, was like a man who must perform a surgical operation upon himself—the most difficult of all

surgical operations. He must himself cut out his own heart—for the good of his general health!

To help him in this, Providence, apparently, had first put into Myrtle Rome's pretty frivolous head the idea of "The Romantics," and then sent down a mad novelist to Wasteneys. So roundabout and apparently inconsequent are the methods of Providence.

CHAPTER XXVI.

RELIGION TO THE RESCUE.

AGAIN, he had written down "Religion," with but little hope that it would answer to his summons. Where, indeed, was the religious impulse to come from; or rather, where was the form to make his vague, though rich, religious impulse operative, the form he could accept?—for, strange as it may seem, religion, in the most religious minds, is thus dependent upon its form. And yet, perhaps, this is not so very surprising, for what is form but an instrument? When one closely considers the matter, one comes to see that the religious sense naturally craves, even relies upon, formulæ for its expression, as the artistic sense relies upon its formulæ, form and colour, and so forth. Religion is one of the forms of human expression—let us unanimously admit that it is the

highest—and is, therefore, as inconceivable without form as language without words.

Though Wasteneys had come to see that mere reason was inadequate as a critic of religion, he was not yet prepared—nor was he ever likely to be prepared—to return for the expression of his spiritual sense to formulæ which certainly came within the scope of the critical reason. Long as he might, in such moments as that Easter morning, to employ again the fair old sanctified forms of religious usage; he knew that for him the life had gone out of them for ever. They had no longer any power to concentrate the spiritual force of his nature—which, thus lacking organs for its expression, ran to waste. He had at one time dreamed that it might be his task to strike out new forms for the homeless religious spirit, and it had seemed to him, as to others with the same dream, that the forms of art must more and more take upon them sacerdotal duties. Art, at its highest, is an affirmation of the spiritual nature of human life, and of all life; and such affirmation is the essence of religion. Yet art represented rather a longing, an aspiration, than

an actual authoritative revelation. Art dreams, but religion knows.

And, after all, perhaps it was not so much new formulæ that Wasteneys had been in need of, as of some new emotional impulse, a renewed vision of divine things sufficiently clear and sure to arouse his sluggish soul to that passionate optimism the practical outcome of which is that serious conduct of life, for which so long he had lacked a motive sufficiently powerful. Given that vivifying impulse, it might well happen that the old forms might once more become for him living organs sufficiently expressive. Yes! the more he pondered, the more he saw that it was not so much the old forms that had worn out, but the vital spiritual forces in his own soul that had dried up. So long as these were renewed, surely it mattered little what forms they chose to vitalise. When the fire descends upon the altar, the constituents of the sacrifice are of small importance.

Though his love for Meriel had certainly not begun as a reinforcement of his spiritual life, but had indeed, superficially speaking, operated in

precisely the opposite direction, yet he began to see that in the end its significance was to be that of a spiritual revelation; that this love had come to him, not for his personal joy, not for any mere human happiness, but simply for the sake of that renewed vision of the divine. For many years "reason" had closed his eyes to the essentially supernatural ordinance of life. It was necessary for a passion whose reality he could not question, and yet a passion essentially unreasonable, to possess him, that he might perceive once more the obscured divinity in mortal things, and thus awaken to his immortal responsibilities as a mysterious actor in a mysterious universe.

Wasteneys had indeed been right in considering Meriel as of supreme importance in his life; and he had been mistaken only in his estimate of the nature of that importance. He had deemed her important for her own sake. Now he began to see that she was not the end, but one means to an end, an end which for a while he had forgotten. Though the first result of her influence had been that he had cast all his duties to the winds, she

had really come into his life that he should apprehend all the more forcefully the one duty which includes all others, man's duty towards the cosmos. This, of course, is what Father Selden had foreseen when he had said to himself: "If he loves a woman, he must end by loving God." One need hardly say that the phrase had not occurred to him as one for general application. It is only in exceptional natures that the love of woman ends in the love of God. For the majority of men, as the Catholic Church has foreseen, the love of woman is anything but an ally of the love of God. In the average nature, indeed, it is a dangerous sensual distraction, against which the Catholic Church does well to protest by the symbol of celibacy—for, as all the world knows, celibacy is not a literal, but only a symbolical condition of the Catholic priesthood. It is merely a metaphorical recognition that for most men women are dangerous enemies of the divine life. It is only the select natures among men that are helped by the love of women, and they are helped, because they have the power to use woman as a means instead of an end. It is one of the

fiercest temptations of the spiritual-natured to treat woman as an end in herself. You might as well consider a rose-bush as an end in itself. Woman, indeed, like the elemental spirits, is for man exactly what man chooses to make her. She can materialise him, or spiritualise him, as he himself decides. Had Meriel only been more normally woman, had his love for the mortal creation been more indulged, Wasteneys' materialisation had been inevitable. Fortunately, Meriel had denied him those satisfactions that narcotise the soul. Instead she had reawakened in him an unrest which claimed a nobler peace than any which woman could bring, set his soul once more asking questions for which no mere woman was sufficient answer. Once more the boyish hunger and thirst after righteousness was clamorous within him. Surely it was well that he should have been saved from deeming a woman adequate for the satisfaction of that divine appetite. And yet, what must he do to be saved? Whence was to come the true heavenly food, and what was the heavenly work clearly given him to do?

In spite of his love and reverence for Father

Selden, Wasteneys knew that the answers of his Father Confessor to these questions could not be his answers. The Church of Rome had been, and still continued, so dangerous a spiritual obscurantist, so unscrupulous a trader in human superstition, that, so far from his ever dreaming of joining that subtle communion, he rather regarded the complete demolition of the church of his fathers as the first condition of the New Church of the Spirit. The Church of Rome was the Bastille of Faith. So long as one stone of it stood upon another, no spiritual, or even political, progress was possible for mankind. Rather indeed than return to that exquisite, aristocratic, politically vigorous, but spiritually effete, communion, he could have conceived himself joining some naïve, democratic, even vulgar and grotesque, schism, in which, however coarsely, the warm blood of faith freely circulated. Religion, he realised, was a serious matter, not merely the concern of spiritual and moral dandies. Like all forces with a big universal work to do, it must often be coarse in its methods, and unfastidious in the choice of its instruments. There had recently been moments

in which Wasteneys had seriously considered whether or not it was his duty to join the Salvation Army. And when the small devil known as the Sense of Humour grinned him out of the impulse, he realised more than ever that humour, as usually understood, is an impertinent critic of such feelings; and that, perhaps, your true humourist is known by no gift so surely as his power to distinguish between what we call "a lack of humour" and a serious purpose. Indeed, few people are strong and wise enough to be trusted with the sense of humour, which becomes a dangerous solvent in the wrong hands, too often destroying in its possessor his more serious qualities of heart and mind.

For this religious sense, too, the mysteriously decreed reinforcement had been provided, and it was to come from one of those popular expressions of religion where at one time he would have been little inclined to seek it. Adeline Wood had been brought up among Nonconformists, and, though she had been compelled to abandon Nonconformist theology, she sometimes found herself involuntarily longing for those old-fashioned Sunday mornings

of stormy prayer and praise, when each individual in some inspired congregation of earnest worshippers seems to lose personal identity and be merged in the general gusto of jubilant faith. A few streets away from her Adams ceiling was the great chapel of a Wesleyan preacher, a famous spiritual fighter, a man of great personal force and charm. There she would sometimes go, as sometimes she would go to hear great music, or press her way into the pit at theatres. She loved the sea-like invigoration of a great crowd of people all filled with the same enthusiasm. It made her forget the loneliness that sometimes came over her, like an ache. She lost her personal identity, and became but one joyous wave of a buoyant human sea. Of this great preacher Adeline had occasionally spoken to Wasteneys, and one Sunday afternoon, chancing to pass the doors of the great man's chapel, and, seeing the preacher's name conspicuously posted, he decided to go in, partly out of curiosity, and partly for Adeline's sake. Adeline was still at her post as nurse, and Wasteneys was missing her more than he realised. She wrote to him sometimes, happy letters

full of the joys and humours of her deputy motherhood, letters which gave him dim pangs of an undefined pain, and made him feel strangely lonely.

On entering the vast circular hall—already a humming bee-hive of faith, though the service did not begin for half-an-hour—Wasteneys was struck, even startled, with a characteristic which he had never before associated with churches and chapels: the place was *alive!* indeed it vibrated with vitality. He understood at once why Adeline cared to come here. It was a sort of human seaside. The mere murmur of the vast crowd was as invigorating as the sound of the sea. It was a spiritual ocean awaiting its Neptune.

When the Great Preacher took his place upon the platform, Wasteneys was immediately attracted. He recognised him at once as a notable performer upon the Human Instrument—and, in so describing him, he implied no charlatanism. Far from that, he soon gave himself up to the masterful bow of the speaker's energetic faith. By a coincidence, which bore an unfortunate resemblance to the stories of the Religious Tract Society, the preacher had

chosen a theme which, for appropriateness, he could not have bettered, had he deliberately spoken individually to Wasteneys, instead of generally to two thousand odd listeners, all equally in need of salvation. His theme was the necessity of national religion, and the inadequacy of mere "culture" to take its place. With much force, and with a grasp of historical illustration which gained, rather than lost, from picturesqueness of presentation, he showed how the best-intentioned morality was ineffective compared with an apprehension of certain supernaturally revealed truths. Man collectively, as individually, was incapable of saving himself. Indeed, without the assurance of some "far-off divine event," it was not to be expected that man should even see the necessity of "saving" himself. If his life ended with the grave, and if the harvest of his self-discipline was to be reaped entirely by his descendants, it was asking a superhuman, almost priggish, sacrifice on his part—when one considered the hardships of godly living—that he should deny himself the comparatively small margin of self-indulgence which even a worldly life of average success allows. With-

out the impetus of an immortal significance, morality, so-called—that is clean and seemly, and reasonably altruistic living—was merely a matter of taste. Really nice people might prefer to be spiritually clean, as they preferred physical cleanliness, from personal comfort; but, without the assurance of a divine meaning to the human struggle, it was difficult to show how that struggle was worth while for those who lacked the taste or energy for carrying it on. Spiritual æsthetics might help some natures, but such natures were few, and, for the most part, lacking in force. What the world needed was as real a reason for believing in goodness as it had for believing in food and clothing. Unless goodness could be proved a vital necessity of the individual soul, it was idle to ask large numbers of people to practise it. As life is usually lived, it necessitates quite sufficient self-sacrifice. To expect us to deny ourselves not merely in the present but in the future, not merely for our children and our friends, but for the unborn mendicant, is surely a fanciful demand; *unless* man is indeed a being of an immortal destiny, and, therefore, properly, of immortal obligations.

Morality, the gospel of "sweetness and light," might be sufficient for natures of exceptional grace, though even so it might be held that such force as it possessed came of the religious impulse from which it originally sprang. All our secular altruistic movements took their life originally from Christianity, however careful they might be to dissociate themselves from Christian theology. And, however counsels of morality might operate upon special natures, who, it is usually seen, are living good lives on an inherited capital of goodness, transferred to them from pious ancestors; it was certain that mankind *en masse* stood in need of supernatural incentives to clean and serious living. It was one of the clearest lessons of history that what we call national prosperity went hand in hand with a vigorous national religion. When a nation begins to secularise ideals, which are properly dependent for their life on mysterious revelations and mysteriously supplied energy, its power begins to decline from that moment. When in Greece and Rome human philosophy took the place of the gods—imperfect hints of the divine as those gods were—Greece and

Rome surely declined, before nations inspired by the vigorous youth of a new religious ideal. Modern philosophers, who would substitute moral philosophy for religion, had in Greece and Rome an object lesson which was unanswerable. The experiment they would try had been tried before, and completely failed; tried, too, under circumstances exceptionally favourable, tried with two races which an eminent ethnologist had declared as superior intellectually to the English race as that race was to some savage race of central Africa. Could there be a clearer illustration of the truth that man's brains cannot save him? If philosophy and culture could save a nation, Greece and Rome would have been powerful nations to this day. And this law of nations is the law of individuals too. Some few exceptions only proved the rule; and, generally speaking, it was true for individuals as for nations—that serious and beautiful lives could not be lived merely on social motives and incentives.

A year or two before Wasteneys would have contested this reasoning, but life had taught him how essentially true it was. The divine motive in

his life had been symbolised by Meriel. That withdrawn, how purposeless, how unworthy, his life had been. Poor, indeed, had seemed the interests of culture, and certainly little dynamic; so soon as he lacked the Divine Incentive.

Yet though he realised this mentally, and was conscious of an awakening within him of spiritual forces long dormant, he could not yet see where the new incentive was to come from. Here the preacher failed him. The Divine Incentive, said the preacher, could only come through an acceptance of the Christian revelation. Wasteneys, on the other hand, could not but feel that here the preacher was endeavouring to lay down his own personal experience as a universal law. Not to speak it profanely, Wasteneys might in a sense have preached that the only way of salvation was belief in Meriel —for it was through her that the something divine in existence had been most authoritatively revealed to him. Mentally, Wasteneys was very much at one with the preacher. He might almost have used the very words of the Christian creed: "I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy Catholic Church; the

Communion of Saints; the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting" —all these being symbolical terms for literal truths which he was beginning to comprehend. But how to make this mental acceptance operative in the moral sphere! One firmly believes in many facts which have no influence upon our lives, and one may admire many various activities without any wish to participate in them ourselves. Belief, to be of any practical force, must be passionate. The preacher apprehended these truths so passionately that he desired with all his heart to persuade others to apprehend them too. Perhaps Wasteneys would some day apprehend them no less passionately, but, meanwhile, he saw them—as a convalescent contemplates the vigour of athletic youth —with but a dim wish to take part in the game.

It is the failure of many preachers to realise that it is comparatively easy for some to reach that state of mind in which one exclaims: "Lord, I believe." The business of the great preacher, as the greatest have instinctively realised, is not argument, but persuasion. It is their success to infuse into us

their personal enthusiasm, to make us as passionate for righteousness, as if righteousness were a woman!

Of this quality of persuasiveness the preacher presently proved himself possessed in no common degree. His sermon had struck Wasteneys by its intelligence, by its first-hand acquaintance with the things of the soul; but it was not till an after-service, in which the preacher drew closer to that more earnest and sensitive part of his audience which had remained behind after the completion of the general service—as is the custom among Wesleyans—that he realised what a force the man was. The service in which the preacher makes an individual appeal to such members of his audience as have not before accepted the Christian revelation, definitely to proclaim themselves then and there Christians, is a customary feature of all Wesleyan services, and, like all religious offices, may be, and often is, ridiculous, in the wrong hands. The preacher, however, was not only a born evangelist, but he possessed sacerdotal gifts as well; and he was thus able poignantly to vitalise a hackneyed

method with his personal sincerity, and to impart a moving dignity to an office which might well have offended by a democratic familiarity of tone. There was something almost tragic in the strong emotion of his appeal, and Wasteneys noted as strange how remarkably he was able to establish a particular *rapport* with each single member of his audience, to make each forget that this was a public gathering, and entirely to banish that shamefaced self-consciousness which naturally besets all but the most ardent souls, when called upon to make such public confession of faith. Conventional tremors fell away before that masterful pleading voice. Here and there in the vast audience one and another silently stood up, and the preacher spoke to the man or woman thus mutely signifying the mystic change of the heart, as though they two were alone together in the presence of God. Wasteneys marvelled at the love in the man's voice, the yearnings to make those who were still wandering in darkness see the light that was so clear to him, and the skill with which time after time he varied his mode of appeal. He was so good and yet so

clever—this fisher of men. But how *good!* How unselfishly was he spending a physical strength manifestly not inexhaustible, straining every emotional, magnetising, nerve in him to catch another wandering soul.

"God! how good the man is!" Wasteneys exclaimed under his breath, and it seemed to him that in another moment he must obey that pleading voice, so stern and yet so gentle, and definitely take his stand on the side of the spirit.

But—the platform! Was it *his* platform? Was this somewhat crude and provincial organisation that through which he could best express the surging truth that was in him? The more vital voice within warned him against a spiritual fastidiousness, which has brought so many spiritual impulses to nought. It told him that the man who does the work of the spirit takes the first instruments to his hand, at the moment of his call, and is not delicate because some of them chance to be somewhat old-fashioned and countrified in shape.

While he hesitated, suddenly a sweet voice near

him said: "Would you care to speak with Mr. —— after the service?"

A little bird-like girl, in a costume that suggested both a nurse and a nun, had stolen near to him while he was wrapt in the preacher's voice.

"I should," he said, almost involuntarily, noting the lit small face, and thinking how beautiful goodness made certain faces.

It had been one of the preacher's innovations in a church which sometimes looked askance at him for the unconventionality—and consequent success—of his methods, to found a kind of lay sisterhood. Though he was a stalwart enemy of Rome, he was not a narrow one. He saw that the methods of Rome were founded on a deep knowledge of human nature, and answered to human needs, and in this sisterhood he adopted one of the most powerful of them. This sisterhood—of which the sisters were not required to take any irrevocable vows—was not so much religious in character as a secular plan for utilising by clever organisation the unemployed pity and goodness of lonely woman-hearts. Little Sister Catherine was one of the most active of the

sisters. A childishly tiny, fragile girl, with a face that was almost spectral with eager spiritual light, one would hardly have thought, as one looked at her, how much intimate knowledge of the world's darkness lay behind those pure brows and living blue eyes. That holy little face had looked on human sorrow and vice in their foulest and most painful forms, and that pure girl's heart was the sympathetic depository of the strangest human histories.

The work of the sisterhood might have been summed up in the beautiful old words: "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." No one was too foul or too broken to win the sympathy and help of these good sisters. They had only to come and say: "I am unhappy. Help me"; and it was the aim even of the sisters to save them this exertion, so far as possible. At these services, one of which Wasteneys was attending, they made it their business to hunt for souls, like sleuth-hounds, in the vast audience. They watched the faces of the listeners, and, with their terrible knowledge of human misery, they picked out the faces it might be possible to

help, unerring specialists of sorrow. Sister Catherine had noted Wasteneys early in the service, for there was that about him which made him somewhat of an apparition in that Nonconformist hall—where, however, it was no uncommon occurrence—such was the spell and the fame of the preacher—to find a Cabinet Minister, or a great artist, listening, with a long look in his eyes. She had watched the effect of the service upon his face and divined something of his need. Thus her instinct for sad people had once more distinguished itself.

When Wasteneys went behind to see the preacher, any embarrassment he might naturally have feared was instantly dispersed by the immediacy of the preacher's recognition of him. The preacher was not a spiritual leader for nothing, and, as the woman in Sister Catherine had seen the sorrow in his face, so the man in the preacher had divined something of the cause of it.

The wise provision of tea gave a social character to a serious occasion, and Wasteneys was interested to notice how merry these Christians were over their cups of tea.

There were several sisters and many of their conquests gathered in the little tea-room. No doubt each of these spiritual victims, so to say, had expected some rather unctuous *tête-à-tête* with the great preacher. If so, they were pleasantly disappointed. Instead, they found him the gay father of his spiritual family. The stern prophet of the platform was for the moment laid aside and he was the gayest of men, a very boy for all his sixty years. Such humanity seldom accompanies such sound and serious divinity. He chaffed, one might almost say flirted, in a fatherly way, with the sisters, and all sorts of stories of the humours behind the serious work of the day were exchanged and discussed. The newcomers felt themselves admitted to a sort of innocent behind-the-scenes.

At the same time, the preacher was on the look-out for the serious word with anyone of his visitors who seemed anxious to seek it; and, when Wasteneys found himself, tea-cup in hand, for a moment *tête-à-tête* with him, he was almost startled with the sudden intimacy of the few brief words the preacher addressed to him—words in no way

sanctimonious, no mere perfunctory talk, but words that he felt were really meant for *him*.

He on his part had been outspokenly sincere.

"It almost broke my heart," he had said, "to hear how you pleaded with us, how you strove to make us feel what you were feeling, see what you were seeing."

"I wish you would come and help me," the preacher had replied, looking at him steadfastly. "There are few who could help me as much as you."

Wasteneys thought of Father Selden's words: "I do not fear for you. You belong to God. More than many you were born His child. You cannot escape His love."

So different in external methods, there was a deep resemblance between the two men, the resemblance that all holy and strenuous men bear to each other.

So Wasteneys made an important new friend, and so it seemed that he saw once more the mysterious guiding hand in his life. From this time he seldom spent a Sunday in town without drinking at the bracing wells of the great preacher's eloquent faith;

and, in addition, he became a welcomed guest at the great preacher's house, a familiar of his book-lined study, which resounded often with the alternating clash and mirth of vigorous debate. His first impulse to embrace the preacher's faith and calling died away, as he realised the intellectual difficulties it involved; but his chance dropping-in upon that Wesleyan chapel was far from being in vain. Father Selden's prophecy was coming true. In the maze of life his apparently erratic wanderings were bringing him nearer and nearer to the one way out—the Way of the Spirit. There were many byeways leading into that great high-road. Father Selden pointed to one, the preacher to another. Wasteneys felt that there was still another bye-way—his own. It seems strange that when men clearly see that they are travelling to the same destination they should be so fastidious about their particular route. But so it is, and thus, alas! the dearest friends have travelled a whole lifetime in painful estrangement from each other, though both were surely journeying by different roads to the City of God.

CHAPTER XXVII.

SISTER CATHERINE UPON ROSE-GARDENS.

GOODNESS! We have seen that one of the results of Wasteneys' possession was that he early shrank from good people. They were so serious! It was a sign of his returning health that the great charm for him of the people amongst whom he had been brought by his accidental encounter with the preacher was their wonderfully attractive goodness. For all these years, beauty—that is the world as revealed to the delighted eye of the senses—had been for him his standard of life. Now he was beginning to feel that goodness was even more beautiful than beauty; and the purpose in these good people, the fruitfully directed purpose in their lives, stirred within him an emulative desire once more to live his life energetically to fine issues.

Yes! how good they were, and what a divine

pity it must be that sustained them in lives of such arduous, yet so light-hearted, self sacrifice. He had never met any people so happy as these who literally had not a moment of time to call their own. And several of the sisters had given up homes of delicate comfort to live in slums where every sense was jarred from morning till night; places painful alike to sight and sound and smell, and places inexpressibly painful to the finer senses of the soul. Sometimes, Wasteneys felt a longing to join in the work they were doing, on its purely social side. If other duties might seem doubtful, there could be no doubt of the rightness of alleviating human misery, of lightening human darkness. If this was not his special call, at least he might, in some humble practical way, be assisting in that, while the special call became clearer.

Sister Catherine smiled when he confided to her, somewhat shyly, his thought.

"Come and try by all means," she said, "but you needn't be unhappy if you don't feel at home in the work, after all. I think you have another work to do."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, your mission, so to say, is to the classes, rather than—like mine—to the masses. But come and read to my match-girls some evening and try. They love poetry—particularly Browning; and I am making them quite interested in Maeterlinck!"

This, of course, was only half serious. Sister Catherine was too practical a missionary to think much of rose-water as a means of salvation, though she realised that it had its uses sometimes, and she applied it, with no little success, to the more sensitive natures coming under her care. For, she was a great believer in the essential refinement of the average human creature.

Wasteneys never summoned up courage to face Sister Catherine's match-girls, but he would sometimes seek her for tea and a talk in her workman's dwelling.

The connoisseur in human misery and degradation could not have found a place more favourable for his melancholy studies. On his first visit Wasteneys had some difficulty in discovering Sister Catherine's building. He sought information of a sad, bloated

woman, who was carrying a jug of beer from a public house, which was a remarkable example of the sensitiveness to ignoble use even of brick and wood and three coats of paint. In nothing is the mysterious power of the invisible over the visible so clearly seen as the effect of human habitation upon the very material of which our houses are built. Clean, strenuous, living results in a stately old house like Wasteneys. What a different tale was told by every house in that street, but particularly the grimy leering front of "The Jolly Fellows." Even by charming streams, where the water runs clear and the green leaves ripple, the place where the beasts come to drink is always miry with the tread of hoofs.

But to return:

"You go down to the mews yonder," said the woman, "and turn to the left, just before you come to the coffin factory."

The coffin factory! "The Jolly Fellows," and the coffin factory! Such were the two extremes between which Sister Catherine had chosen to live her life. He thought of his grassy garden at

Wasteneys, its green shadows, its luxuriously grouped trees, its azalea-scented air. Into that garden came no sounds save the call and call and call again of the cuckoo, or the chiming of the village clock; and all day long clean clover-breathed winds fanned it with freshness.

The coffin factory! There was ignominy too both towards life and death in thus compelling the twain to live, as it were, side by side in this gruesome ludicrous fashion. It must mar the proper solemnity of the thought of death in the minds of the living, as surely it must unduly overshadow existences with at best but little sunlit margin. Life must be dreary enough in "Jones's Rents," without its being thus further darkened with so grim an industry. To Wasteneys it seemed now as if that street was presided over by a grinning skeleton—but, of course, such thoughts troubled little the heads, say, of the woman who guided him, or of the children playing within sound of the screaming circular saws, that, from gaslit dawn till gaslit eve, cut out the cheap wooden shrouds. Such thoughts were only for people who lived in gardens, and were buried in

marble vaults. Even the last luxury of appreciating their degradation is denied to the poor. Wasteneys wondered if he was not perhaps a little over-sensitive to live the life of a philanthropic worker. Yet, the flower of Sister Catherine's face managed to keep as bright and pure amid it all, as if it had been washed in May dew.

Her little kitchen was a wonderful contrast to its grim, unsavoury surroundings. Here again was another illustration of the influence of the invisible human spirit upon its surroundings. Literally a workman's kitchen, with an open grate and oven, and a dresser or plate shelf, and two or three rough chairs. Yet how fresh and pure, and even distinguished, it looked. Sister Catherine, who evidently luxuriated in asceticism, allowed herself no other luxuries—not even a comfortable chair. Wasteneys wondered, as he looked at her face, which was a little over-wrought, whether she allowed herself even such necessities as sufficient food and sleep. He thought too as he looked round the little kitchen, severe as a monk's cell, of the strange diversity of human nature. On one hand were men and women seeking to gratify their

senses by every possible device of novel indulgence; on the other there were men and women who found their satisfaction in denying themselves systematically all the others so greedily sought. He could not help smiling to himself. How absurd human nature was, even its idealisms. Then his eye fell upon Sister Catherine's little bookshelf: Blake, Emerson, Shelley, Edward Carpenter, Maeterlinck.

Ah!

Starry food—all of it.

A playful application of a profound line of Lucretius occured to him as he noted the food of this starry little woman.

"*Unde æther sidera pascit?*" he said, laughing.

"Translate, please," said Sister Catherine.

"O, only something about 'on what does the ether feed the stars?' I was thinking of your books, the food of stars!"

"You mustn't pay compliments. It's never done, I assure you, in Jones's Rents."

No indeed! and at the moment there plainly came to their ears the moaning of the steam saws turning out the poor man's coffins.

Wasteneys took down "Wisdom and Destiny," and his eye fell upon a passage of peculiar fitness to the moment: "Indeed, if we had only the courage to listen to the simplest, the nearest, most pressing voice of our conscience, and be deaf to all else, it were doubtless our solitary duty to relieve the suffering about us to the greatest extent in our power. It were incumbent upon us to visit and nurse the poor, to console the afflicted; to found model factories, surgeries, dispensaries, or at least to devote ourselves, as men of science do, to wresting from nature the material secrets which are most essential to man. But yet, were the world at a given moment to contain only persons thus actively engaged in helping each other, and none venturesome enough to dare snatch leisure for research in other directions, then could this charitable labour not long endure; for all that is best in the good that at this day is being done round about us, was conceived in the spirit of one of those who neglected, it may be, many an urgent, immediate duty in order to think, to commune with themselves, in order to speak. Does it follow that they did the best that

was to be done? To such a question as this who shall dare to reply? The soul that is meekly honest must ever consider the simplest, the nearest duty to be the best of all things it can do; but yet were there cause for regret had all men for all time restricted themselves to the duty that lay nearest at hand. In each generation some men have existed who held in all loyalty that they fulfilled the duty of the passing hour by pondering on those of the hour to come. Most thinkers will say that these men were right."

Wasteneys pointed the passage out to Sister Catherine.

"Don't you think the philosopher excuses himself a little lamely for hastening back to his own quiet pursuits, instead of taking his place in the hospital of human suffering? 'Thinkers' will agree, he says. Of course. Thinkers naturally back thinkers. And what a delightful euphemism is that word 'venturesome'!"

"But surely he is right? We have each one our work, and, however much we may wish, we can do no other."

"Of course, I know that that is the flattering unction which artists and philosophers lay to their souls. Yet I confess I am inclined to think the human importance which they attach to their work is only a sop to their consciences, only a grand way of excusing a selfish indulgence. It is true that a philosopher may be serving mankind, as he walks to and fro his grassy Academe, and ponders to the song of the birds—but, at all events, it is a very pleasant way of serving mankind. Philosophy! Poetry! what are they worth, compared with good surgery and good nursing? All the philosophers and poets that ever lived have done nothing for humanity compared with the man who discovered chloroform."

"But you forget that all ways of serving mankind are pleasant. Else, I'm afraid no one would serve."

"That sounds cynical, doesn't it?"

"I suppose it does. Yet you wouldn't have people doing work for which they are unfitted?—and in work fitness and pleasure always go together. Do you think the man who discovered chloroform would

ever have found it unless it had been a passion with him to find it—unless he had been a born doctor, and took as positive and personal—self-indulgent—pleasure in relieving human pain as others seem to take in causing it?"

"No doubt that is true, but, all the same, you cannot deny that a larger proportion of self-sacrifice enters into some professions than into others, and equally it would seem a large amount of practical human usefulness. Doctors and nurses, no doubt, enjoy their sleep as well as other human beings, but how ready they are to give it up at the call of human suffering."

"Of course, you cannot enjoy a pleasure without paying something for it. One has to choose. Would you say that a poet's life holds no sacrifices?"

"Well, at all events, they have told us enough about them," said Wasteneys.

"You are hard on your own calling," said Sister Catherine. "You talk of anæsthetics. You forget what a wonderful spiritual anæsthetic is a good book."

"O, I know! A poet is a sort of nerve-doctor,

if you like. He can help people who imagine they are ill, and sit at home nursing their petty spiritual ailments. But I envy the man who can stop a real pain, a pain that makes the poor tortured body scream out in agony, or the woman who brings bread to the starving, or takes little lonely frightened children and makes them happy. They are doing the real useful work, the good work."

"You have a work no less useful, no less real. Believe me, that you would only waste your time trying to do another's work. My work, for instance, little as it is—you couldn't do it—no more than I could do yours."

"I should love to try."

"Would you like to live in a place like this? Could you, even? Answer me candidly."

"Surely I could do it, if you can."

"No, that is not an answer. This is my work, and in a true sense I would rather live here than anywhere else; that is, taking my nature all round, this life gives it its fullest satisfaction."

The sound of the coffin-saw wailed on in the distance.

"I'm afraid, after all, I couldn't," he said.

"But you needn't be unhappy about that," said Sister Catherine, after a pause; "there must be some men to look after the rose gardens."

"You are in danger of laying too much stress on self-sacrifice," she continued. "Some help the world that way—though there is much less self-sacrifice, and far more self-indulgence, in such work than you think of—but others help it by self-fulfilment. I mean that some help the world by doing without, and others help it by enjoying everything within their reach. Though, indeed, doing without is for some natures a part of self-fulfilment. Then again, you must remember that to relieve pain is not the only way of making men and women happy. There is the other way—that of definitely adding to their joy. The man who invented anæsthetics was indeed a benefactor to the race, but the man who grows roses in his country garden and sends them to a hospital is no less a friend of human suffering. The poet who expresses the joy of life in a lyric, or the philosopher who concentrates his

vision of the ultimate good of things in some bracing essay, is surely doing the world's work, like any other worker, and, because his work may seem more easy and pleasant, he must not fall out with it on that account.

"Yes! there must be some men to look after the rose gardens. That may be the gardener's form of self-sacrifice—to accept the burden of enjoying and singing, while his heart all the time cries out against his own security and yearns to join the sufferers in the darkness outside his gate. He will help them best by staying in his garden and singing with a light heart among his roses. So they too will walk in the garden."

"Ah, it is an easy way."

"Perhaps not so easy after all. Roses do not grow of themselves. They need much care. Have you thought of that—thought how sweet the soil must be kept, how the roses must be pruned, and trained and protected from blight? You speak of the unselfish care of doctors and nurses, but believe me that a really beautiful rose needs as much care as a wound."

Wasteneys' face grew a little sad. He had neglected his rose garden.

"You had forgotten that?" said Sister Catherine, gently.

"I'm afraid I had," he answered.

"Then think of the responsibility of the man to whom a rose garden has been given. How careful he must be not to fail in his trust, not to neglect his garden, not to allow it to lie idle and devoured by weeds. But there is even a greater danger than neglect. He may forget that the garden was given to grow roses in, and, out of the evil of his heart, just to indulge a dark fancy, he may grow beautiful evil things in his garden, poison-flowers instead of roses."

"Yes, he must be a good man—the man who grows the roses," said Wasteneys, with a sigh.

"He is, and will be, and he will grow more wonderful roses than he has yet dreamed of."

"You really believe that?"

"I do."

He seemed to hear an echo of Adeline's voice:

"But, of course, he is a real king in the end, he must be a real king."

"Alas! You don't know how he has neglected the garden."

"Never mind, the gardener will work all the harder for that. Perhaps he had to forget his garden for a time that he might value it the more when he came back to it."

"How good you are! And how strangely you understand."

"Hush! . . . I am not good. I love roses, and I am only making friends with the gardener. Mind you bring me a rose, dear gardener, next time you come to Jones's Rents."

So Sister Catherine contributed her share in the saving of one more soul.

"How good women are!" he said to himself, as he walked home, quite forgetting that he had recently cursed them in St. James's Park.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

VICTORY IN SIGHT.

"HE must be good—the man who grows the roses!" At all events, he must be serious. He must take rose-growing seriously.

Roses! He found himself humming: "I shall never again be friends with roses," and then, having, to speak the truth, forgotten it for many days, he opened his manuscript volume and wrote therein to this effect:

> "World that once was a garden—
> Where is the Rose?
> Where has the Nightingale gone?
> It has followed the Rose.
> Where is the face that once lit,
> Like a flower, at the Nightingale's song?
> Gone with the Rose and the Nightingale,
> Gone with the song."

But, though he was rather pleased with these lines,

he realised that their sincerity, so to say, was retrospective. He no longer felt quite like that. Indeed, the world was once more becoming a garden. If the roses were scarcely budding as yet, he realised that they were still alive. The winter had not killed them, after all. And if the roses came back, the nightingales must follow. But what of

> "the face that once lit,
> Like a flower, at the Nightingale's song?"

Well, who knows! Perhaps he had been mistaken in thinking that the world held only one beautiful face.

At the same time, Wasteneys well knew that it was to no *face* that he was to owe his emancipation, if that emancipation was ever to come about. His imperious possession was to be cast out by no rival possession. He knew that in any strife of faces, there would never for him, as long as he lived, be any face that would seem more lovely than the face of Meriel. He could not, would not, rob that face of its beauty; he was determined only to rob it of its power over his life. This he had willed,

vaguely and brokenly indeed; but, however feebly we will, if we will really, good or bad powers of the air hasten to help us—and we have seen how Wasteneys was being helped. He was being helped by the reawakening in himself of divine forgotten instincts, instincts that forbade him any longer to treat his life merely as his own; to use, or waste, or give away, as he pleased. Larger laws of his nature were reasserting themselves, to which even Meriel must bow. Like some statesman, who dare not wreck his country for a mistress's smile, so Wasteneys slowly realised once more his duties to his own soul.

He was a man, he was an artist, he was—perhaps—an eternal spirit, liable to render an account of his stewardship before the throne of some mysterious Lord of Life, who, having given all, had surely a right to demand something in return.

One owed it even as a courtesy to the Divine Unknown to make some little of this beautiful gift of life. Yes! Life was beautiful—beautiful, in spite of all. *Of course*, it was beautiful! It was the merest priggishness of pessimism to deny it.

Life—*without Meriel?* Yes! O, apostacy!—life without Meriel!

Thus it seemed in some moments that the battle was ended; and the reader might well imagine that this history might now make a considerate conclusion on the spot. May the historian remark, as an excuse for its necessary continuation, that the hero is now evidently enskying himself on very lofty pinnacles indeed, and that, therefore, as he is not yet quite at the top, there may presently be——well, a fall. It is not anticipated that he will fall to the very bottom of the precipice—and yet, one can never tell!

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE WATERS OF FORGETFULNESS.

In the matter of resolution much depends upon your avoiding anything likely to break down your resolution. If you possess the portrait of someone that you don't want to love, but do love—keep it in a drawer; if you have a packet of letters locked away—throw the key into the river. If you have work to do, and a bottle of old wine is likely to tempt you at dinner—don't let it be brought to table. We poor human beings pride ourselves, amusingly, upon what we call our free will, and yet there is perhaps nothing in creation more at the mercy of external influences than man. There is no important part of us that cannot be influenced by powers, vegetable and mineral, of which every village doctor knows the properties. Little herbs that grow

in the meadows can turn our brains, can fill us with a fever of loving, or, with a little yellow juice, stop for ever the beat of our ambitious hearts. The spirits that live in crystals and the virtues that belong to soft-coloured earths are quick to brighten or deaden the soul; and, indeed, all we are and do is actually the result of the co-operation of innumerable and often indefinable forces—including the very humblest. An extra cup of tea, a glass of wine too little, or a forgotten pilule of energising chemical, may decide one's fate. There is nothing too humble to be counted in that mysterious collaboration called a human deed. If a man does during the day what he sets out to do in the morning, he does it only by rigid attention to those influences which he has learnt to know can alone fulfil what he is pleased to call his intention! If he neglects, or attempts to substitute, one of them, he jeopardises his whole purpose. Let him look into no unexpected eyes—for a sudden face at a corner may ruin all. Let him shut eyes and ears to every sight and sound not in the day's reckoning. Only so shall he escape alive at the day's end into the arms of his purpose.

Nothing would be easier for a man who knew his friend, and who was at the same time properly skilled, to set himself to defeat any of his friend's early-morning resolves by a clever arrangement of distracting influences. A book left open at a certain place, a song hummed at a given moment, a drink *à propos*, a handkerchief faintly scented with a past that you chance to know of. . . .

What an art there is lying here as yet unformulated, a terrible art—and yet as capable of beautiful, as of sinister, employment. As Wasteneys looked back upon his history, he seemed to see that the life which he had flattered himself had been of his own strenuous making had actually been as helpless as the unfolding of a flower. It is true that we have just seen him deliberately willing, and so far succeeding in, a certain course of action. He had willed to be free of Meriel. Actually, life, when it had first wrapped up his various fateful characteristics in a little magical seed, had never for a moment intended him to be Meriel's slave, except for so long as was necessary for one of its unfolding processes.

But, of course, Wasteneys didn't know that. That

is where nature is at once so kind and so unkind with us. She pretends, the Great Mother, that, children-like, we are walking all by ourselves, and we have no idea that she is secretly supporting us, and directing our footsteps, all the time.

Will—did Wasteneys say? Did he really flatter himself that it was his will that had been helping him in this battle? I suppose that sometimes he did—particularly as week after week went by without his giving Meriel even a thought. So an explosive will lie quiet for years, and one might even come to the conclusion that it had lost its explosive qualities, a harmless handful of black dust. One might even try it with a match, secure in its long idleness. Wise people don't! Wise people are so clever! But, alas! an unwise human man, inclined to be happy that he (he!) is getting the best of some powerful malign influence in his life, is all too likely to gratify himself by putting his security to the test.

It was weeks, indeed months, since Wasteneys had unlocked that ebony shrine. He told himself that he really did not care about looking at Meriel's

face any more, and there was a certain measure of pure untroubled forgetfulness of that shrine before which the candles had long been extinguished, and the white roses withered. There were days on which he forgot Meriel entirely—which was terrible. Sometimes when this forgetfulness was brought home to him he thought he was very unhappy, but, mixed with his unhappiness, was a certain exultation at his growing power of resistance. So out of sheer confidence he circled round the explosive, and in one rash moment decided that it was really no explosive at all. Anyhow, he was eager to try the experiment, and so, one night, radiant with self-reliance, he turned the key in the Renaissance cabinet and looked again at the face.

His *will*, did we say? He was willing now with all his might, as he looked at Meriel—but he might as well have pitted his will against chloroform as against Meriel's face. What was all this he had been thinking and saying to himself? Anger, pride, religion, his duty towards the cosmic scheme—Heaven save us!—were all very well for theoretical warfare; but, when Meriel herself appeared on the

field of battle, where were they? Before that beauty, and the joy of beholding it, will and duty and all such abstractions fell to ashes. Here was his joy—let him will or think what he liked; and though, thanks to the powers unknown that were helping him, he was determined to win, none the less, he realised that it was to be a negative victory—a victory that his immediate self would rather not have gained—a victory indeed that he must win for something in himself which expressed itself to him rather as duty than as joy. Meriel still remained for him the one thing in life he wanted! He was engaged in delicately rearing other life instincts, with considerable success; but he could not truthfully say that any one of them, or that they all together, possessed any such vitality as his love for Meriel. He *must* be a "King," and a King he would be, but, without the love of Meriel, to be anything at all seemed foolish and unprofitable. A child may seriously feel that too much confectionery is bad for it, and restrain its appetite accordingly, but it is no use pretending that it prefers spelling, or that, however successfully he may spell, whatever school-crowns

he may wear, spelling will ever take the place of the surreptitious sweetmeat. Yet, as childish habits of luxury have to be held in check, if the child is to grow into the man; so, it would appear, the luxurious fancies of the grown-up man and woman must be disregarded, if that man or woman has serious intentions of becoming an angel.

Ah! but such images are inadequate, perhaps even disrespectful—and yet, maybe, they are not so inadequate after all, for there is nothing more mysterious than the palate, and its various music. There is, seriously speaking, no profounder mystery presented to us than the taste and distaste for olives. Heaven, as we remarked on an early page of this book, is a personal matter—on which other people's criticism is irrelevant—not to speak of its being discourteous.

No, we do many things in this life that, when, with no little effort, they are done, we are glad, even proud, of; but which, personally, we would not have chosen to do. We really wanted to do something else, wanted to do it with all our hearts—but nature, taking no account of our personal wishes, intent only

on her own plans, insisted on our doing this beautiful "self-sacrificing" thing!

Wasteneys was determined (so nature bade him!) forcibly to banish Meriel from his life. He still loved her—must always love her, in a sense—yet he was determined to put an end to her power.

But the agony of it! As he looked at her face again, it seemed as if these last months, with their impressive resolutions, had meant nothing. His longing for her was as keen and simple as at the beginning. What were all these substitutes that he had been carefully nurturing. In his heart he knew that there was no duty or ambition that could for a moment withstand one look of Meriel's eyes. And as he realised this, the old longing came over him to see her again, the old wild hope possessed him. At last, maybe, she was a simple human woman. After all, she was so young! He had not sufficiently remembered that. He saw her once more in the strange morning light, in all the bloom of her young womanhood. For him she still remained "the miracle"—the miracle that only befalls once in a life for man or woman. Other women might be

beautiful and noble too, might make far better wives than Meriel, but their gifts and qualities were human, whereas Meriel was superhuman. She was the miracle-woman in Wasteneys' life, and in the mere thought of her was all the wonder of the world.

"O, she is my joy—my joy!" he cried, struggling hard with memories and longings. He did not know of Adeline's prayer: "O keep him good, and give him his joy"—a prayer about answering which nature had her own ideas. Yet, though in the fierce fire of his longing all his newly-gained strength seemed to melt like wax, enough was left to make him determined to conquer. He would not go back to Meriel, though his heart broke with staying away. Could it be that she was calling him again? Was all this suddenly awakened pain the mysterious answer of his heart to the far music of her violin?

No, no! He would not listen. Whatever it cost him, he would forget. Forget! he laughed savagely as he fought with his longing like a great coiling snake. Forget!

It was in such a moment that he came upon the

gipsy's packet of forgetfulness, which he had tossed into a drawer of his desk with an incredulous smile. He smiled again as he rediscovered it; but, like someone in physical agony, he was in the mood to try anything, however fantastic, that promised to ease awhile the cruel aching of his heart. He undid the packet. It was absurd, and yet—who knows? Besides, the white powder, the gipsy had said, was to be mixed in with wine. The wine alone might help. He had heard men talk of drowning their troubles in wine. Had he not seen them doing it? . . . and a thrill of horror passed through him, at a memory of "Coleridge's" old haunt. A more gracious memory intervened in the verse of one who had professed much comfort in wine:

> "And lately, by the Tavern Door agape,
> Came shining through the Dusk an Angel Shape
> Bearing a Vessel on his Shoulder; and
> He bid me taste of it; and 'twas—the Grape!"

Yes! in all ages, there had been men who had found peace in wine—ah! but what a peace! And what a cowardly running away! Better the pain a hundred

times. No, no, no!—and yet—the pain! O, Meriel!

Cowardice or not—O, the pain!—he would bear it no more: this unfathomable loneliness of the heart. No one dreamed it cowardice to shelter the bodily senses from pain with numbing drugs. Why then should it be cowardly to seek an anæsthetic for the suffering of the soul?

So it was that, pulled this way and that, he at last ended the struggle, and set his lips to the waters of forgetfulness.

CHAPTER XXX.

ADELINE AS DEPUTY-MOTHER.

SPRING had come again, and Adeline Wood was sitting over some "mending" in her sister's Surrey garden. It was a bright April afternoon, suddenly warm as summer, and near her her two young charges were playing in the sun: Harold, a boy of four, already experienced in the management of toy railways, and the movements of large bodies of tin horse and foot; and Agnes, a mysterious mite of sixteen months, rapidly assimilating the various human formulæ, and already knowing a good deal more than she was able to put into words. Words, however, were coming fast, and one word she said in a way that wrung poor Adeline's heart with a joy that was half pain. It was the word "Auntie." When she called "Aunt-ie," in her little childish

quaver, Adeline would pick her up and strain her to her bosom with a passion that an observant eye might have found full of pathos. If "Auntie" were so sweet, how wonderful it must be to hear a little creature say "Mother"— or "'Mammy' I suppose they say to real mothers," Adeline surmised.

Along with the joy of her deputy motherhood, Adeline was beginning to understand and anticipate the peculiar sorrow of nurses, of childless women who give all their warm mother-love to another woman's child, only in the sure irresistible course of time to be torn from it, with a cold cheque to heal their bleeding hearts. In a sense the nurse's profession is a peculiarly tragic form of prostitution. The nurse sells her mother-love for money, as another woman sells her wifehood; both being the slaves of an unjust society. For many months now Adeline had known the nurse's joys. With a shiver, she realised that she was soon to experience the nurse's sorrow, for her sister was coming home—and "I am sure," the sister had written, "you are longing to be back at your book-binding."

Book-binding! How little mothers seem to under-

stand their blessedness—how little understanding they seem to have of the hearts of childless ones whose ears are "filled with the murmer of rocking cradles." How complacently the happy married sister, with her home and her husband and her children, regards the lot of her unmarried sisters, and, with the best will in the world, congratulates them on their—book-binding! One sister, maybe, is earning quite a big salary as a high-school teacher, another perhaps is doing well in an office—and so on. How lucky for them! "But *you*—you," one can imagine the high-school teacher, and the clerk, exclaiming in a moment of feeling: "*You* are a *mother!* You have fulfilled yourself as a woman. We have failed. We only hang on to existence by doing man's work. Book-binding! High-school teaching! Type-writing! Don't you understand that we were born to be mothers? Mothers! Mothers!"

Yes! Adeline's heart ached as she watched the moment approaching when she would have to go back to her book-binding. How dusty and lonely that little work-room seemed in her thoughts—for

all its Adams ceiling. There were moments when she felt that she could even marry a stockbroker, and settle down among "handsome" furniture in some horrible suburban villa—if only, if only, she might have a little child, a little child, that no one had the right to take from her. So distressingly had Adeline retrograded from her early intellectualism; with one result, at least, that must be noted—she was all the prettier for it. The slight suggestion of the woman's rights look had disappeared from her face, which had also grown rounder, owing to country air and regular meals. Her eyes too were softer, and deep in them slumbered a warm fire that had never been there before. Poor Adeline! Was it to be her fate quietly to quench those fires, and by degrees put off her nurse's apron and put on once more the whole armour of bachelor womanhood; or would someone come along to meet that fire with answering fire, and would there someday leap out a little white flame of love which she should shield in her bosom from the winds of life. O, would the lover come who should whisper: "To-day with the rising of

the sun, we shall make his blue eyes; and at noon we shall lie together and make his warm heart; when evening comes we shall mould his rich and secret mouth;" or: "Beloved, someday we will lie all moon-naked on the top of the world, and from our lips shall rise an incense which shall presently break into a little soft ascending star."

This afternoon her "mending" had been momentarily forgotten, and her eyes were bright with such dreams, as a servant came across the grass bearing a card upon a tray. She took it up absently, then blushed with a great wave of feeling. Wasteneys had taken it into his head to run down and surprise her at her nursing. Wasteneys had indeed been rather surprisingly the sport of fancies and sudden impulse of late. This was one of the good impulses.

"O yes!" she exclaimed, possibly betraying her delight to the maid, "please ask Mr. Wasteneys to come into the garden."

"Why, how well you are looking!" exclaimed Wasteneys, with really something of surprise in his voice, as they shook hands.

"You say it as if you had never seen me look well before," she replied, blushing again, and not without some inkling of what he had meant. He meant: "How much prettier you look than I have ever seen you look before—and something else too," but he answered; "Well, I don't think I ever saw you look well quite in the same way—if the remark is not too stupid."

"Never mind me. But how are you? *You* don't look too well, I'm sorry to say. What have you been doing with yourself? You look tired."

And she looked anxiously into his face, but seeing something there that she felt she ought not to question, she took the opportunity of Agnes's toppling approach to turn away and leave the question unanswered. Agnes came up calling "Aunt-ie" in her most heartbreaking way, and, of course, had to be hugged on the spot. Then she was introduced to Wasteneys, who, though he lacked the violent arts of childish entertainment, had a quiet way of attracting the childish attention which would no doubt develop into more articulate and formulated methods under practice. At present his methods

were very humble and limited, but, such as they were, they sufficed soon to win for him the shy friendship of both Agnes and Harold. Harold, who was learning botany as well as tin soldiers, presently asked his opinion as to the name of a flower growing in the meadow, with the result that all repaired thither, Agnes enthroned on Wasteneys' shoulder, the sad man having become a light-hearted "gee-gee" for the occasion, a gee-gee urged across the meadow by a spirited switch in the hands of Harold. The flower duly found and named, Wasteneys took the driver on to his other shoulder, and so all returned to the lawn in triumph.

A nurse presently taking the children away, Adeline and Wasteneys were left to their grown-up interests—though indeed the thoughts of neither strayed very far from the children. Both secretly desired to be again with the children, for the children protected them from each other, saved them from a self-revelation which each was desiring, yet fearing. It was not till they were in the nursery that they were real again. This was at bed-time, when, Adeline explained, she was expected to sing certain

little songs of her own making which had attained a great nursery popularity. Wasteneys begged leave to be present. Poor Adeline! It was too bad. Yet Wasteneys begged hard, and then perhaps deep down in her heart she was not unwilling that he should see what a good mother she could make. Harold, although four and a man, did not hold aloof from this child's hour as might be expected, but entered with great simplicity and gusto into the revels.

The reader unfamiliar with their charm may wish to be spared an account of these revels; while the reader whom happy nightly experiences have made familiar with them will not need to be told. Between the two readers, the writer may conveniently escape a difficult task. But he is of opinion that no harm can be done from including one of Adeline's little baby songs—which have a relevancy in this history in that they moved Wasteneys as the very greatest poetry had long failed to do, and filled his eyes with surreptitious, but not wholly unrecorded, tears.

Here was Adeline's latest jingle for Agnes, and,

of course, it had a witching tune to it, also of Adeline's making, which, had you been Agnes—or Wasteneys!—you would wish to go on for ever, and without which the words sound flat and unmusical. It will be seen too that the lines lent themselves to that literal farm-yard imitation which is the surest way to a child's heart. (If you can really crow like a cock, or grunt like a pig, your fortune is made in any nursery.) But here is Adeline's poem:

> "O where has baby been to-day!
> And what has baby seen to-day!
> She saw the *Moo-Cow*, and she heard
> The pretty little *Dicky-Bird*,
> She heard the *Cock-a-doodle-doo*,
> She heard the *Pussy-Cat* say 'Mew,'
> She heard the *Donkey* say 'Hee-Haw'—
> So much and more she heard and saw.
> She also heard the *Gee-Gee* neigh—
> O baby, what a busy day!"

Does the reader smile—smile the smile of the superior person—at Adeline, for making such nonsense, at Wasteneys for appreciating it (actually with tears in his eyes!) and, most of all, at the

writer who records it? All the same, it is in such nonsense that man is happy.

"O Lord, by these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit. . . . ."

As Wasteneys watched Adeline, a voice in his heart broke through the bonds of silence, and insisted on being heard.

"Why! I love her!" he suddenly said to himself. "How good she is!—how beautiful!" But immediately a gaoler voice within his soul was heard sternly commanding the escaped thought to its prison:

"No, you do not. You love me—only me. There is no joy in life for you, except me."

So spake the Enthroned Superstition in his soul—but a thought that has once escaped into utterance will escape again. After all, Nature is a tremendous ally, and Nature had her plans for these two people. It was not for nothing that the voices of children were growing to seem sweeter and sweeter in the ears of both.

"A mother of little human babes!" Even when Meriel had been by, Wasteneys had been conscious of that deep need of his nature. Alas! Meriel

could never be that for him—and more and more the mysterious Love of the Child was growing within him. A few days ago, unobserved at his windows, he had watched the village lads playing cricket on the green. How he had loved their gaiety, their absurd exuberant antics, their prankish inexhaustible vitality. Why had he suddenly burst into tears as he watched them? Could it be that he had no little son of his own?

Of course, the thought—intellectually speaking—was absurd; entirely against the dictates of *reason* —for who but a madman would desire to bring into existence a being of voracious appetites which can only be fed at one's own heart, a beak of young needs that pecks vigorously at one's purse, and, as soon as it develops a voice, fills the old nest with its domineering notes—heir to the eternal illusion that the world was made for it, and it alone? Yet, here again Nature tricks us. The tragedy of motherhood has been the theme of poets and philosophers since the beginning, and, if all the world were wise, there would be no such foolish thing as a mother and father to be found on this planet. One

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can only hope that mothers and fathers get some pleasure out of their parenthood. Perhaps, after all, the pelican loves to give its own blood to its young—who can doubt it?—and, if no young come tapping at its breast, considers itself a disappointed bird. This seems to be as good an explanation as any other of the mysterious continuance of parents on this planet.

Before Wasteneys left to catch his town-train that night, he asked, with a blush that might have been Adeline's:

"Do you think I could—could—see them—asleep?"

O what a happy girl he was making Adeline!

Yes! He saw them asleep; and, as Adeline and he bent over Agnes's cot, and loved the chubby little determined face, he said softly, half to himself:

"So *this* is a little child! A little child!"

"Yes! a little child," echoed Adeline, "isn't it wonderful?"

And then they had looked at each other with strange eyes, and held each other's hands a moment over that sturdy little sleeper—who no doubt was

dreaming of "gee-gees," or, if her sleep was fortunate, of pigs.

An hour later, Adeline came and kissed them softly. He had not kissed her, but he had kissed them. So Adeline had become a perilously happy girl.

CHAPTER XXXI.

IN WHICH MERIEL CALLS ONCE MORE.

YES! it was a perilous happiness for Adeline, for, like most joys, it was made of hopes, and waiting for Wasteneys at his rooms in St. James's Street was a letter very dangerous for those hopes. After all this silence, one more of the old Commands!

"*Come to me. I am lonely*," ran the selfish little note.

The mere sight of Meriel's handwriting always made Wasteneys' heart beat as though it would break, and indeed it beat now, but he was a little surprised to notice that there was comparatively little of the old joy in the beating. Indeed, the main pulse of it was a curiously different feeling. Elation there certainly was. He was glad, glad, of this letter, but glad in a queer fierce way—glad, it might almost seem, with anger.

"Yes! I will come," he said, almost fiercely, "be sure I will come."

I have said that for some time Wasteneys had been subject to sudden fantastic impulses. Many of them came to nothing, owing to a saving indolence of nature. A mere passing thought would sometimes glow gigantically into a fully equipped purpose, and then as suddenly fade back again into nothingness. It mattered not how wild the thought—it was a serious matter for the moment. In such a mood he had renewed once more his intercourse with Daffodil Mendoza, under an amusing impression that there was peace for him in her arms: the simple elemental woman! In such a mood he had sought Sister Catherine and asked her to marry him, glowing, as he was at the moment, with a dream of joint spiritual work together; a combined slum and rose garden, one may suppose! Fortunately for both, Sister Catherine was obliged to confess that her heart was elsewhere. In her work? Well, not entirely. In such a mood he had violently reopened the old love-story with Myrtle, and received in exchange many letters of great literary beauty.

These were the most harmless of his fancies, but there were others which were less innocent, and two especially which held him with a dark fascination. He was growing more and more superstitious, he, who had once been a very prig of rationalism!—and he found himself giving heed to hints and indications, to dreams and omens and warnings, which before he would have brushed aside, or indeed never have remarked at all. Had the gipsy mingled madness in the drink she had given him? Was it Death, after all, that waited for him—and for Her!—in the Waters of Forgetfulness?

Death, for him—and for her: that was the thought that was more and more possessing him. We have seen how he was impressed by that strange paper of the Vivisection Novelist. Even before that, once or twice, his unformulated resentment had, so to say, vaguely fondled a revolver. His reason had laughed him to scorn. Let him make an end of his own life if he pleased. But why should she lose hers—merely because her nature was different from his? The point of view was preposterous. So said reason, but instinct went on fondling the

revolver. Presently instinct even began to reason —absurdly as instinct will. She loved him. That she confessed. That is she was his, and he was hers. Their lives were indissoluble. She belonged to him, as he to her. But he was lord—so said Nature. The man was the ruler. His will must prevail. She loved him, and yet she denied him her love, toyed with him, tortured him, profaned and wasted the marvel that life had given them, saw his life turned to dust for her sake, yet felt no shame—tried no way to help it—dreamed idly by the sea: an idle woman—needing the whip!

The whip! She was too strong for that. No small mortal whip would serve. There was only one whip for her haughty spirit—a sudden lash of flame on her white breast. Then how good to lash out his own life with the same white fire, and lie —all ended for both of them—by her side. The gipsy's words often came to his mind: "It is a noble way."

This was the dream that was growing dangerously sweet for him, as day by day he drank of the Waters of Forgetfulness. For a moment he had

forgotten it as he had stood with Adeline over the cradle of that little child; but, when he reached home that night, nerve-worn with the various emotions of the day, and found that letter—O, then the dream suddenly grew a giant again, and, as Wasteneys took a deep draught of wine from a tray that glittered in the waiting lamplight, he laughed the laughter of one who feels that the end is coming at length: sad or glad, what matter, —*the end*, and being the end, surely glad!

He took out his little revolver from his desk, and fondled it. He had been practising with it of late, and two cartridges remained in it. These he carefully drew. It must not go off *by mistake.* No! it must go off very deliberately. He even dreamed that perhaps Meriel might consent to her execution; see that it was just, that it was best, that it was even the only happy way for both of them. A sentence in one of her letters came to his mind. It read like a prophecy: "The chill of fairy fingers is on my heart—the chill that ends in death."

Replacing the revolver in his desk, he turned to

look for his Bradshaw. She wrote from some inaccessible little place in Provence.

Provence! It sounded like Myrtle! Troubadours, roses, old French! Suppose Meriel after all was only a more cunning form of Myrtle? Had his deep simple feeling been fooled, after all, by a woman's taste for the decorative in human passion?

Such a woman would hardly be worthy of—death. And, yes, yes—Meriel was worthy of death. So Death decided on the ten train next morning from Victoria.

Meanwhile, Adeline could not sleep—for dreaming.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE LAST JOURNEY.

THE making of a resolution is always invigorating, but no resolution is so invigorating as the resolution to make an end, to come to conclusions with one's destiny. When at last a man says, "I will stand it no more," and really means it, a great energy passes into him, and with it a great peace. Wasteneys had not been so happy for many months as he was during his journey south. All the confusions of his life were soon to be at an end, all the wanderings hither and thither, all the misleading hopes and the misconceived endeavours. The power of life to harm was soon to pass; soon he would be beyond the control of any chance.

> "Fear no more the heat o' the sun
> Or the winter's furious rages.
> Thou thy worldly task has done,
> Home art gone, and ta'en thy wages."

His journey seemed one long ecstasy of farewell. Every mile he travelled was a good-bye to another mile of earth. It was strange to think he would never see London again, never see Paris, never speed through these vineyards of Central France any more as long as the world endured.

And for Meriel, too, was he not bringing the gift of peace? For he knew that their love had been a thing of pain for her also, a broken promise of perfect things. If she had failed him, he no less had failed her; and yet neither could win free of the uncompleted dream. Imperfect as it was, it held too much beauty for any other dream to take its place. There was only one way of bringing it to an end, and in that moment of ending perhaps the dream would grow suddenly perfect, just for a strange moment before it went out for ever.

He wondered how it would all be, and involuntarily he pictured their meeting—then suddenly her fearful terror as she realised his mission. He saw her look frantically this way and that as if to escape, and then he saw all the wild beating of her wings quietly subside beneath his firm eyes. She had

sometimes doubted his reality, the reality of his love, now she would know that he was real—at last she would believe in his love, believe that it was a passion no less transcendental, no less free of the "little love" of earth, than her own.

So with unmoved purpose, and with the tranquillity of the sure end upon him, he slept peacefully through the last few hours of his journey, opening dreamy eyes a moment upon a phantasmal moonlit Avignon, and arriving at Marseilles in a great calm of dawn. An hour or two later he found himself at the end of his journey in one of the less frequented stations of the Riviera; a little green shelf of white terraces looking through palm trees out across the Mediterranean Sea. Meriel was not here, but in a little rock village of the hills half a dozen miles away, to which this was the nearest point.

It was still quite early in the day, so he was glad to throw himself into bed and finish his interrupted sleep.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

PHILOSOPHERS OF THE BUTTERFLY.

LATER in the day, towards the end of the afternoon, he was sitting in a little café overlooking the sea. Near him two middle-aged Englishmen were talking. No one else was in the café. It was a small room and Wasteneys was compelled to hear their talk.

"I saw plenty of Cleopatra up on the golf ground," said one of the two men.

"Any Thais?" asked the other man.

"One or two."

They were not talking about women, but about butterflies, as Wasteneys, an old entomologist, realised. One of the men had a butterfly-net and a specimen tin at his side.

Taking advantage presently of a friendly salutation

on the part of these botanists of the air, Wasteneys, to show that he was free of the mystery, hazarded an entomological remark.

"Did you take any 'Aurore de Provence' to-day?" he asked, "I have an old affection for the fly."

"Memories?" said one of the men, laughing pleasantly.

"Yes, memories."

"Ah! butterflies are all memories . . . What do you say, Willis?" addressing his friend.

"Yes, yes!" said the other, "anything to pass the time. Some men take to politics, some to butterflies. Butterflies are least trouble—and much prettier."

Then the man who had first spoken passed his collecting tin to Wasteneys, inviting him to look at his day's catch. The cork-lined tin was filled with what at first sight seemed flowers, with pins for stalks. Each pin held a separate species. Some of the pins were crowded with rich wings, and all were arranged with the exquisite neatness of the collector. Here and there frail limbs twitched, and a wing rose and sank again. But, for the most

part, the collector had been merciful, and the cyanide bottle had previously put them beyond the reach of any pain.

The talk then became a general comparing of notes—species, habitats and so forth—and Wasteneys' new acquaintance soon took up an attitude of respect to him, as in forgotten cells of memory long-slumbering knowledge re-awakened, and one butterfly after another came back to him, each with its syllabled Latin name. As they talked, an old boyish desire awoke within him, and involuntarily his hand reached out to the net resting on the table.

"I declare, you make me long to go out for a day on the hills myself," he said.

"Why not?"

"Well, for one thing, I have no net . . . and besides I have no time."

His mind suddenly recalled him to his purpose in being here at all. Think of a man on such an errand going butterflying! And yet—why not? Why not one boyish day in the open air before the —long night? *Nox est perpetua una dormienda.*

"As for the net—and in fact anything you want—I shall be happy to lend them to you," said the collector.

"But will you think me unsociable if I go off alone?" asked Wasteneys. "Memories, you know!"

"Of course not. No one hunts butterflies without a serious cause. I take it that all butterfly hunters—*chasseurs des papillons*, as they grandly call us here—are sad men, who make a profession of trifles to hide . . . O well, you evidently know all about it . . . Eh, Willis?"

"Quite so," answered Willis, pouring out for himself a further supply of brandy.

So it was settled, and with the morrow's morn behold Wasteneys afoot, with butterfly net and knapsack—singing—singing!

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AURORE DE PROVENCE.

WASTENEYS had awakened early to a world of pure gold. A vast sunshine, and the Mediterranean, veiled as yet in mists of pale violet. Before his window lay a rich plain, gardens in which this happy land was growing the spring for the rest of Europe: "*violettes en leurs saisons*," palm trees, walls of cypresses, and the sea. Behind rose dark hills, terraced with olive-orchards, and swarthy with forests of cork-oak; but, hidden within their huge arms, green valleys and running rivers and the young vine.

Wasteneys' way lay among the hills, and, as he mounted higher and higher, and the sea spread out in broader spaces beneath him, his heart seemed to rise with his ascending feet and his soul to

grow cleansed and free. Very strange is the influence of height and great spaces on the soul. It would sometimes seem as if one has only to climb high enough—and to stay there—for all our earthly imperfections and weaknesses to fall away. The spirits evil and heavy that weight us down to earth on the ordinary levels cannot breathe upon the hills. It is impossible to think certain weary thoughts at a certain altitude—they belong so exclusively to the low-lands, to narrow streets and dark rooms of the town.

It was already summer in Provence. To open a window or a door was to let in the breath of roses like a tide of perfume, and the nightingales were busy tuning their throats in the thick-leaved gardens—not yet the long violin-like calls, only the first tentative chucklings, like bubbles rising from still unfathomable seas.

As Wasteneys passed up the well-known hill side, nature was playing once more the same divine tune she had played when, a boy, he threaded the rocky orchard paths ten years before. Not a note was different; and she might well be content with the

old music. The fig-trees, that had looked so lifeless but a week or two ago, were suddenly holding out large green hands. Cistus, white and red, was feeding in great flocks at the morning sun—at first sight bringing one's heart into one's mouth, so like was it to an English wild rose. Here and there, among the underbush, neighbours of the holly-like dwarf oaks, orchids, ivory and velvet and dew, added to the general luxury; and among the stones the asphodel reared its steeples of silver stars.

And here!—ah! surely far from home—was an English hawthorn!

Flying grasshoppers suddenly shot across into the olives with a dry clatter of wings like dead leaves, lizards rustled every few yards, and now and again some innocent little snake would flash in terrified loops into the grass. Humming-bird hawk-moths flickered over the rocky places, and here a scarabeus was rolling his circular household to some suitable burial place. Distinguished butterflies, like tiny Japanese fans, came and went swiftly on the breeze, or danced together in pairs high up against the morning sky.

Presently Wasteneys made his first swoop with his net.

"*Charaxes Iasius!*" he exclaimed—the words coming instantly to his lips, though he had not used them for ten years. A large handsome fly, not uncommon around there. Deftly taking it from the net, he uncorked the cyanide bottle. In a moment the lovely wings had grown weary, and its butterfly joys and sorrows were at an end. He thought of Meriel as he watched the fair thing die—for, curiously, it was to a great sumptuous butterfly that he had compared her on his first vision of her in that morning meadow.

Presently he lost sight of the sea, as the rocky path, cresting the hill, turned inland into a world of dark rolling hills, which at first sight promised nothing but the evergreen of the cork-oaks. As one walked on, however, many a hidden grassy place became revealed, and dingles of a more spring-like green. Far away down in the very heart of the hills the eye was suddenly gladdened by what at the distance looked like an avenue of fountains playing. It was a great lane of plane trees just

breaking into leaf, and, though the house was yet hidden, Wasteneys knew that it led to a large farm-house which gathered in the riches of one of the broad valleys opening out among the hills. The wealth of that valley was chiefly in its vines, and he remembered long ago looking with awe into one of the great barns, cool and dark and smelling of wine, where the grape was stored in enormous vats and barrels. A large genial old Frenchman, whom he had thought of as the God Bacchus himself, had come out as he peered in, and offered him a draught of wine. He had seen it drawn from one of the great barrels, and he remembered still how good it had been, fresh and pure as though it had just been drawn from the earth itself—as in fact it had. Wasteneys, another day, had bought a whole litre bottle of it for forty centimes. He wondered if the old man was still there—for it was upon him that he relied for the jug of wine for his breakfast in the wilderness.

As he walked on, he felt as happy as a man who has just come out of prison. The world seemed as fresh as though it had been newly created.

Never even in his boyhood had he taken more sheer simple joy in the sun and the breeze and the woodland loneliness. In a dream he wandered on, now on the path, and now drawn away from it by some beckoning gleam of the sun suddenly lighting up a distant flower, or by one or another of the little flitting shapes he was ostensibly hunting. Only entomologists would be interested in an account of his captures, and to himself they were chiefly interesting for their power of reminiscence. Each species that he was able to name brought back his boyhood the more vividly, and he was surprised to find, in spite of all the years, how easy it was to recapture this old boyish satisfaction, how little his intervening experience had impaired his zest in these old rambles hand in hand with nature. He was still the old nympholept who could fall into a dream over an effect of sunshine, or listen by the hour to the sound of water over stones.

Yes! it was a good world, and, after all, was there any wound nature could not heal if only we gave her time, and submitted ourselves more constantly to the cleansing streams of sun and air and flowing

river? One could almost imagine even physical wounds being healed by the mere touch of this wonderful southern sun, the gentle surgery of this golden inexhaustible god. Wasteneys recalled with shame that nature had offered him healing in just this way a year ago, for it would soon be Easter again; and, meanwhile, many other good and gentle influences had come offering to make him whole. In spite of them all, the wound was still open, so it seemed—and during this last winter he had fallen back upon those paltry anodynes which he knew to be as powerless as they were unworthy. He was disappointed, disgusted, with himself, but evidently the wound was one that could never be healed—or be healed only in one way. . . .

As his thoughts thus wandered into the shadows a light little gleam called them back into the sun.

"*Aurore de Provence!*" exclaimed the stricken lover, with his net suddenly alert and pursuing—but his reverie had been indulged too long, and the little speck of sun escaped the cyanide for that day.

After three or four hours' wandering among the

hills, he came out suddenly at last upon the avenue of plane trees—and there, as if indeed his boyhood was determined to come back in every particular, was old Bacchus standing in his path, superintending the swarming of a hive of bees which had taken a fancy to cluster in a large velvety mass on one of the knobs of the planes. It seemed to Wasteneys that the old man looked exactly as he had last seen him, for Bacchus had long been at one of those fortunate ages when ten years make little perceptible change in a face. He was still an old firm oak of a man, and Wasteneys looked at him with envy and some shame. So it was to have lived in accord with nature, like a tree: one looked in vain upon that handsome healthy old face for traces of a mind diseased, or fancies of the heart. This excellent old man had done his duty to the universe like some mighty vegetable, that looks not to the right or to the left, but just grows in obedience to the cosmic order. So, though his girth grew larger, no young tree in the forest was more freshly or abundantly vernal than this vast old man, who would certainly never die of old age,

but only because the woodman has decreed that no tree can go on growing for ever.

So once more Wasteneys peered into the great wine-smelling barns, and once more became the possessor of a litre of the purple earth wine for forty centimes. By this time it was close on noon, and the knapsack was growing heavy on the shoulder. It creaked pleasantly with its new burden of the wine, and Wasteneys began to look on grassy corners with an eye to breakfast. Presently he came to the banks of a happy little river, and, in a meadow thick with mauve anemones, he sat him down with his back to a sheltering tree, and the river running deep and clear at his feet. As he unpacked his knapsack, he grew trivial with elation :

"*A Book of Verses!*" he exclaimed, as he took the first series of "Poems and Ballads" from his knapsack.

"*Underneath the Bough*"—a sycamore.

"*A Loaf of Bread*"—a pati, French rolls, Roquefort cheese and two oranges, with leaves on them.

"*A Jug of Wine*"—at forty centimes the jug.

"*And . . .*"

Wasteneys stopped a moment and then went on laughing—

"*Ah! Wilderness were Paradise enow.*"

Indeed, it was a wilderness to which "Thou" had been almost superfluous. It was a solitude so satisfying that a companion would have been an intrusion.

He spread out his meal neatly before him and presently fell to with that appetite which is more than half our joy in earthly things. When the meal was finished, he rolled himself a cigarette and serenely contemplated the green world about him, lost in a mighty satisfaction. Idly he had picked up his Swinburne, read a verse or two of "Felise," and idly let it slip from his hand again. But some lines went on idly singing in his mind, the words of the only English poet of our time who has written words worthy to be set to music by a running river. He said them over to himself dreamily, in no way accenting their application to his own story, barely indeed conscious of it, so deeply

charmed was he by the various wood magic, lulled by all the murmurs and perfumes and flecks of light and shade:

> "We played at bondsman and at queen,
> But as the days change men change too;
> I find the grey sea's notes of green,
> The green sea's fervent flakes of blue,
> More fair than you.
>
> "Your beauty is not over fair
> Now in mine eyes, who am grown up wise.
> The smell of flowers in all your hair
> Allures not now; no sigh replies
> If your heart sighs."

And then, lying with half-closed eye-lids—just aware of the murmur of the bees, like a golden harp-string thrumming in the sun, he found himself saying to himself again and again:

> "The sweetest name that ever love
> Grew weary of."

Then he forgot all except the hot sun and the warm scents and the river. Slowly as he watched the river rippling at his feet, he became lost to all except its freshness and its coolness and its merry running. One by one his senses stole away

to bathe in the laughter of some miniature rapids that made most of the music, and suddenly, almost before he realised what he was doing, he found his body undressing and on its way to join his spirit in the laughing water! Merely to have said that he bathed, like any other man or woman might, in a cool river on a hot summer afternoon, would not be adequate to the occasion, for this river of Provence may well seem to have possessed unusual qualities. The old love-doctor, it may be recalled, had written of "a river in Greece": "that if any Lover washed himself in it, by a secret virtue of that water, he was healed of Love's torments." Water indeed, as he adds, "*omni auro pretiosior.*" Had this river of Provence a similar occult property? For, as Wasteneys lay in the rapids, with the boisterous water streaming over him, conscious only of its cool ecstasy, the green glory of summer, and the brilliant sky, which the river seemed to have brought down blue and warm into his very arms, a marvellous contentment possessed him; and with it came a terrible thought that his soul dared at last to speak aloud.

"Why! you are happy! Happy!" cried his soul. The Enthroned Superstition frowned:

"You are not happy! you cannot be happy away from me."

"You are happy—can you deny it?" reiterated his soul.

A breath of hawthorn blew so sweetly across from the river bank that it may be held to have intoxicated him into making his amazing reply:

"No! I cannot deny it," he said, suddenly sitting up in the water. "I cannot deny it. I will not deny it. I am happy—quite happy. Oh, what a fool I have been!"

And then he gave a great laugh of pure joy, and then another laugh of victory.

"It was all a beautiful disease," he said, "this river has washed me whole. It was all a wilful fancy. I see it now."

Once more he lay in the rushing water—for that moment a being in entire harmony with the nature of which he was a part.

"How dare a man be unhappy," he said to him-

self, "while this sun shines, and this river flows, and all these green leaves are his friends?"

In no human intercourse he had known had so entire a satisfaction possessed him, and in his consciousness of that satisfaction he realized that the happy human life is that which is independent of any intermediate human being, and draws its joy direct from the primal springs of being. The man who really loves the sun and the stars, the rivers of the water, and the rivers of the air rippling the green leaves, needs no other friends, and may well be indifferent to the kindness or cruelty of the fairest woman. The great swimmer and the great climber know an ecstasy of communion with the elements which dwarfs all their sweetest human ties. And such are but special examples of the great Earth-Passion, of which the love of man for woman, or woman for man, is but a function. All love of the individual, merely as the individual, is limitation; it is only in the love of the whole that man finds the true measure of himself and his joy.

"Oh, good, good, good world!" he shouted to

the sun and the river; and then, spying his knapsack on the river side, he ran laughing up the bank and took from it—that absurd revolver!

From sheer glee of living and joy that he was free, he emptied its six chambers into the sweet sky. He felt glad that he had at hand so eloquent a means of expressing himself. Then, with a shout, he threw the revolver away from him with all his might—so that it fell in the deepest part of the river.

Slowly returning to the necessity of a more normal behaviour, he took one last plunge in the river and dressed. There was still some wine in the bottle, and he drank jubilantly to the health of the sun. Presently the joy rhythm in his blood insisted on humming itself into words, something after this fashion:

> "All the loving ever done
> Is not so sweet as the kiss o' the sun,
> Nor a woman ever born
> As good to look on as the morn.
> Up, my soul, and let's away
> Over the hills at break of day,
> Following whate'er befalls
> Yonder fairy horn that calls,

Angel-blown in yonder star;
Better far, O better far,
Better far than any girl,
Is the morning's face of pearl,
And the wind about our ears
The true music of the spheres,
And the running of the river
Good to listen to for ever."

These lines prompted a final piece of boyishness. The empty wine-bottle had suggested his throwing it into the river and pelting it with stones—after the approved manner at picnics. But he thought of something more to the point. Taking a leaf from his pocket-book he copied out the lines he had just written, and to them added these lines, which he had once written in an early mood of rebellion:

"I love her love no more. I would have died
For her least need, but of her cruel whims
I am no slave. Man is too much a god
To worship even a woman utterly.
This let one woman learn and one man teach.
A man is woman and a man besides,
A woman only woman."

Placing the poetry in the bottle, he secured the cork and dropped the bottle carefully into the main stream. Then, taking up the net, he went his way back, singing his new song.

At the cabaret he found the two entomologists at their afternoon drink.

"Any luck?" they asked.

"The very best," he answered, though he could not explain further.

"But I wanted an '*Aurore de Provence*,' and just missed one," he presently added.

"Accept one from me," said the entomologist, turning to his collecting tin.

And so it comes about that a small case containing a carefully set little butterfly has a place of honour in Wasteneys' study.

No one but himself and Adeline knows what it means.

Yes! Adeline. For though Wasteneys had realised that our deepest life is lived as units, he had realised too that great aids to the full and happy living of it are a woman who loves you, and little children. To this too, as we have seen, Nature, who had finally rescued him that spring day, had long been leading him. Needless to say, he had returned home without seeing Meriel, and, a few days later,

he was walking at evening once more with Adeline in her Surrey garden. The children's hour had once more drawn them close to each other, and there was a great calm in both their hearts.

"Adeline," said Wasteneys, presently, "if you loved anyone, would you wish them to be near you, and would you be sorry when they were far away?"

"Of course."

"And would you mind if they talked sometimes, and even told you that they loved you a little oftener than strictly necessary?"

"Of course I wouldn't. What woman would? What a strange question!"

"You're quite sure?"

"Certain."

"And would you mind their growing old? And would you fear that daily life together would make each other's little imperfections show too clear?"

"Of course not; surely that is love. But why do you ask?"

"Well, because if you really feel like that, I wish you would find it in your heart to love me."

"But . . ."

She looked up with solemn enquiry in her face.

"You mean the woman the king loved?"

"Yes!"

"She was not a woman. She was a beautiful unearthly spirit—not meant for human love. The king has since learnt to love a real woman."

"Are you sure?"

"Look at me. Do you doubt?"

"Yes! I think—you—love—me," said Adeline, looking long into his eyes.

And so it was that Adeline gave up her book-binding.

THE END.

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